

Title:

Journeys of resilience? Aimhigher and the experiences of young people looked after and in alternative education

Name:

Maria Kukhareva

This is a digitised version of a dissertation submitted to the University of Bedfordshire.

It is available to view only.

This item is subject to copyright.

**JOURNEYS OF RESILIENCE?
AIMHIGHER AND THE EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG PEOPLE
LOOKED AFTER AND IN ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION**

Maria Kukhareva

D. Prof.

2013

UNIVERSITY OF BEDFORDSHIRE

**JOURNEYS OF RESILIENCE?
AIM HIGHER AND THE EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG PEOPLE
LOOKED AFTER AND IN ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION**

by

MARIA KUKHAREVA

A thesis submitted to the University of Bedfordshire in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Professional Doctorate

May 2013

Abstract

The study explores the impact of Aimhigher activity on the lives of young people looked after and in alternative education. In the background of the mixed messages around the effectiveness of the Aimhigher initiative and its closure of the latter in 2011, it is argued that Aimhigher did, in fact, play a very positive role in the young people's lives. In view of recent messages that a similar initiative may be under way, it is necessary to understand, and make use of Aimhigher legacy, including critique and best practice.

The remit of the scheme was mainly associated with improving social justice through increasing the participation of disadvantaged groups in higher education. However, due to ineffective targeting strategies and flawed monitoring mechanisms, it was not possible to establish a link between heavily funded Aimhigher activity and widening participation trends. Additionally, there was a general scarcity of research literature available on the issues related to Aimhigher and its effectiveness. At the same time, documents produced by Aimhigher partnerships feature positive accounts of pupils and teaching staff. Connections have also been made between Aimhigher activity and potential transformations in the young peoples' attitudes and behaviour. There is also a small body of literature that highlights the importance of exploring the unexpected and the unintended outcomes of any project. It is argued that an in-depth exploration of individual experiences is needed in order to understand whether Aimhigher had a positive effect on its participants.

The exploration is carried out using the resilience framework, which allows the researcher to examine the changes in the young people's lives over time. Therefore, the Aimhigher experience is understood as a part of the participants' life trajectories, which are constructed of the young people's interactions with

their environment. Grounding this investigation within literature on resilience and its applications is particularly useful, as there has been an increase in the practitioners' interest in operationalising the resilience framework. The understanding of the resilience-building mechanisms can be utilised in the design of current and future interventions for those disadvantaged and vulnerable, thus contributing to the strength-based discourse around vulnerability and risk.

Interviews were carried out with nineteen young people who were looked after or in alternative education at the time of their Aimhigher participation. In addition, nine professionals from gate keeping organisations were interviewed, all of whom had knowledge of the initiative and the young people.

The findings reveal that taking part in Aimhigher activity can act as a protective factor in a young person's development, thus enhancing their resilient patterns. For several participants Aimhigher acted as an important turning point in their life. However, as resilience is understood as a dynamic complex interaction across several domains, it is the cumulative effect of factors that is crucial. The participants who seemed to be navigating their environments most effectively had the most exposure to developmental opportunities and access to support networks. The study also highlights wider issues around practice and policy on vulnerable young people.

Acknowledgements

My thanks and very best wishes go out, firstly, to the young people who agreed to take part in this study and shared their stories with me, and, consequently, with the readers of this thesis. Their experiences are truly a remarkable example of how resilient children can be despite adversity. I wish them and people close to them all the best in life. For reasons of confidentiality they will remain anonymous but their contribution must not be underestimated. I also extend the gratitude to all the professionals who work with these young people and who were supportive of this project, despite the changing environment around them, public sector cuts and heavy workloads. It is reassuring and humbling to see the dedicated teachers, social workers, administrators and other professionals fully devoted to the young people and their wellbeing.

I would like to express my appreciation to my supervisors, Doctor Isabelle Brodie and Professor Margaret Melrose, for providing invaluable support and guidance to me throughout the process and being very generous with their time; Professor David Barrett and Stephen Kendall, both of University of Bedfordshire, for believing in me and being instrumental in my embarking on this journey. My friends and family have been extremely helpful and understanding and I would like to acknowledge their contribution. My friends Ina Ivanova, David Synnott and Tatyana Demicheva helped me stay grounded and keep things in perspective. I also thank my husband Kevin Cordwell, for his encouragement and understanding.

Maria Kukhareva

May 2013

Contents

Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	v
Contents	vi
List of figures	x
List of abbreviations	xii
Note regarding anonymity and confidentiality	xiv
Author's declaration	xv
 Chapter 1 Introduction	 1
Aimhigher initiative	4
Young people looked after and educated outside mainstream education system	7
The resilience framework	12
Research questions and aims of the study	15
 Chapter 2 Theoretical approach	 19
Introduction	19
Understanding resilience	21
Resilience and symbolic interactionism	24

Resilience, outcome multifinality and organisational	
model of development	27
Risk, resilience and vulnerable young people	29
Resilience domains: factors and mechanisms	33
Conclusion	48
 Chapter 3 The Aimhigher initiative	 51
Introduction	51
Widening participation as a response to the inequality gap	
in education	53
Aimhigher initiative	56
Targeting and cohort	61
Issues around measuring impact	72
Conclusion	80
 Chapter 4 Methodology	 83
Introduction	83
Aims and objectives of the study	85
Theoretical considerations	86
Practical considerations	89
Researcher-practitioner duality	89

Child-centred approach	91
Research tools	93
Ethical considerations	95
Gaining access to the target groups	97
The sample	98
Data collection	99
The interviews	101
Data Analysis	103
Conclusion	112
 Chapter 5 Participants of the study	 114
Introduction	114
Characteristics of the young people	115
Taking part in Aimhigher activity	128
Professionals interviewed	137
Conclusion	139
 Chapter 6 Changes and challenges	 142
Introduction	142
Young people's perceptions of themselves	144
Change as a journey	150

Transitions through care	153
Transitions through education	162
Transitions through relationships	172
Emotional journeys	178
Conclusion	183
 Chapter 7 The participants' experiences of Aimhigher	 186
Introduction	186
Young people's memories of Aimhigher activity	187
"If it wasn't for Aimhigher..."	190
Aimhigher impact: a bigger change	195
Mechanisms of Aimhigher interventions	200
Aimhigher in the multi-agency context	209
Conclusion	217
 Chapter 8 Journeys of resilience	 220
Introduction	220
Internal journeys of resilience	222
Risk and protective factors: clusters and chain reactions	230
Support networks	233
Opportunities	239

Subjectivity of risk and protection	243
Chain reactions and turning points	244
Conclusion	252
 Chapter 9 Conclusion	 255
Journeys of resilience	256
Aimhigher experience	260
Messages for practice and policy	264
“Everybody’s business” (CAMHS, 2008)	273
 Appendices	 275
Appendix 1. Life trajectory maps	275
Appendix 2. The interview schedule template	295
Appendix 3. Types of data used for the study	299
Appendix 4. Word frequencies	300
 References	 302

List of figures

Figure		Page Number
Chapter 2		
Figure 2:1	Protective factors across three resilience domains (adapted from Benzies and Mychasiuk, 2008 and Research in Practice, 2009)	35
Chapter 5		
Figure 5:1	Characteristics of the young people	118
Figure 5:2	Average ethnicity disproportionality index (Owen and Statham, 2009, p.25)	121
Figure 5:3	Characteristics of permanently excluded pupils in England 2009-2010 (DfE, 2012, p. 32)	122
Figure 5:4	Participants' journey through education	126
Figure 5:6	Aimhigher activities accessed by the participants of the study	131
Figure 5:7	Participation in Aimhigher activity	134
Figure 5:8	Professionals interviewed for the study	138
Chapter 6		

Figure 6:1	Young people's descriptions of themselves before Aimhigher experience and around the time of interview	145
Figure 6:2	Young people's descriptions of past self: infographic representation of word frequencies	148
Figure 6:3	Young people's descriptions of current self: infographic representation of word frequencies	148
Figure 6:4	Average scores of resilience domains (past and present)	150
Figure 6:5	Details of the young people's transitions through care	154
Figure 6:6	Details of the young people's movements through the education system	165
Chapter 8		
Figure 8:1	Supportive networks in the young people's lives	237
Figure 8:2	Opportunities available to the young people in and outside education and care	241

List of abbreviations

AP	Alternative Provision (of Education and Training)
BAAF	British Association for Adoption and Fostering
BIS	Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic (groups)
BSA	British Sociological Association
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families (2007-10)
DfE	Department for Education
DfES	Department for Education and Skills (2001-07)
DoH	Department of Health
ECM	Every Child Matters
EBD	Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
FE	Further Education
FEC	Further Education College
FSM	Free School Meals
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Academy
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council

HEI	Higher Education Institution
IAG	Information, Advice and Guidance
IASR	Institute of Applied Social Research
KS	Key Stage
LA	Local Authority
LACYP	Looked After Children and Young People
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender
NCAS	National Care Advisory Service
NFER	National Foundation for Education Research
NICE	National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence
NSPCC	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
NS-SEC	The National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit
RiP	Research in Practice
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SpLD	Specific Learning Difficulties / Specific Learning Differences
UASC	Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children
WP	Widening Participation
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

Note regarding anonymity and confidentiality

All the details that could lead to the identification of the participants of the research have been changed for reasons of anonymity and confidentiality. This includes the names of the young people and professionals in the study and the names of organisations. The names of any other people who were mentioned by the participants (for example, other young people who took part in Aimhigher activities but did not take part in the study) were also changed.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Professional Doctorate in Leadership in Children's and Young People's services at the University of Bedfordshire.

It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.

Name of candidate: Maria Kukhareva

Signature:

Date: 21 May 2013

1 Introduction

This study explores the life journeys of nineteen young people who found themselves at a disadvantage early in life. They had to go through tough times through no fault of their own: some of them were looked after, some had left care; others were educated in alternative education as a result of a negative experience of mainstream education. A number of young people within the group had gone through both care and alternative education.

The stories of the participants are very different; each comprises a ‘tangled web’ of events, experiences and interactions, which make these young people who they are today. However, these nineteen young people have at least one thing in common: every young person in the sample took part in an activity delivered by the Aimhigher initiative. Aimhigher was a Labour Government ‘widening participation’ initiative, which operated between 2004 and 2011 with a view to narrow the education inequality gap in HE (Sutton Trust, 2011). Despite a somewhat mixed legacy in terms of impact, closing down Aimhigher caused uproar amongst practitioners and the media (Attwood, 2010a; 2010b; Boffey, 2011). The ambition of this study is to contribute to the evidence of Aimhigher impact on the young people’s development.

Considering that the young people in this study were on the receiving end of public service provision due to experiencing adversity and having complex needs, it is logical to assume that Aimhigher was only a small part of their entitlement. Similarly, viewed as an event in a child's life, the Aimhigher experience was, arguably, a single experience, which may have contributed in varying degrees to the young people's complex and varied life trajectories within a certain time frame.

However, the role of Aimhigher in the lives of young people, and especially vulnerable young people, has not been greatly explored and there is an absence of academic examination of the initiative. The existing evidence consists mainly of the evaluations and reports submitted by Aimhigher partnerships, and consequently, government reports on the subject of raised levels of aspiration, attainment and awareness of HE. However, with regards to literature that investigates the impact of Aimhigher on the operational and, particularly, on the individual level, there is a rather small body of research (in particular, of qualitative nature); this includes work carried out by Hatt, Baxter and Tate (2008; 2009) which links Aimhigher impact to changes in learner identity.

This study aims to address the research gap with regards to Aimhigher interventions for vulnerable young people and the impact it may have had on their development. The study argues that despite the lack of evidence, Aimhigher played an important role in many learners' journeys to post-compulsory education. Additionally, it is proposed that taking part in an Aimhigher activity may have had a more significant impact on those most disadvantaged, as highlighted in previous research (Luthar, 1999; Rutter, 1999). However, it is important to use a framework, which allows the researcher to investigate the young person's development.

Recently there has been an increased interest in using the resilience approach on an operational level, in particular, in the professional field occupied with supporting vulnerable young people (Schofield and Beek, 2005). The resilience approach provides the necessary broad scope for understanding impact, by incorporating both internal and external environments of the child's development. Moreover, the resilience approach to child and adolescent development shifts the focus from understanding it through the notions of risks and deficits to viewing it through the prism of assets and strengths. With this in mind, the exploration positions the impact of Aimhigher within the broader context of building resilience, with particular implications for young people from care and alternative education backgrounds. Understanding the nature of Aimhigher experience and its potential role in building the resilience of vulnerable young people provides a valuable contribution not only to the knowledge around Aimhigher and similar initiatives, but to the wider literature on vulnerable young people and the support mechanisms that surround them.

It is also important to point out that this study is situated against the background of a changing policy and practice landscape. This study has the advantage of spanning the lifespan of Aimhigher, and, at the time of writing, also, the rebirth of what has been described as a "slimmer Aimhigher 2" (Grove, 2013). During this time frame, Britain saw a change of government, which coincided with the economic recession, and dramatic changes and cuts in the public services, including the ending of Aimhigher. As a result of funding cuts across the public sector, including education and social services, the level of operational support for the young people has significantly decreased.

In view of these changes in policy and practice, and in accordance with the purpose of a professional doctorate, this study aims to shed light onto certain aspects of Aimhigher practice on the operational level, specifically with regard to interventions for vulnerable young people. Having a deeper understanding of ‘what works’ in creating more positive life experiences and future outcomes for these young people has important implications for existing and forthcoming provision. In light of a growing emphasis on promoting resilient outcomes in disadvantaged groups, this study offers new insights into how current and forthcoming interventions can be used to foster resilience in children and young people. Also, while ‘what works’ is something of a loaded term in relation to debates concerning evidence based practice, the study argues that there is value in applying a diversity of methodological and theoretical perspectives to understanding the ‘impact’ of such initiatives.

Aimhigher initiative

Following the lack of solid evidence of success against significant financial investments Aimhigher ceased to exist in 2011, despite achieving “a huge amount” in its work with learners from disadvantaged backgrounds (Attwood, 2010a; Grove, 2012b). The “axing” (Boffey, 2011) of the initiative caused strong reactions in the media, as closing down Aimhigher coincided with increased university fees being announced and other services for young people being cut (Attwood, 2010b; Boffey, 2011). Fast forward to 2013, however, and there is news emerging in the media that a similar initiative may be soon brought into the Widening Participation WP arena as a result of social mobility in the UK ‘stalling’ (Grove, 2012a; Atherton, 2013; Grove, 2013). This brings the focus back onto Aimhigher, its ethos and its operation, despite its legacy not quite being defined.

As already mentioned earlier in this chapter, the Aimhigher initiative was set up in 2004 as a part of a wider policy agenda under the Labour Government, aimed at tackling social, economic and educational inequality in the UK (Hills and Stewart, 2005; McNeil, 2010). Indeed, research points to a 'circular' inter-relationship between education and wider issues of disadvantage and poverty, whereby the former affects the latter and vice versa on the individual, family and structural level (Raffo et al., 2007). In the background of the wider education landscape, access to HE qualifications has been viewed in research and policy through the lens of equality of opportunities and choice, as well as social mobility (Reay, 2012). Whilst it is important to acknowledge that WP strategies can be seen as promoting 'middle-class' values and therefore reinforcing social division (Grove, 2011; Alexiadu, 2012), the issue of truncated opportunities and inequality of choice is still current. Moreover, social and cultural capital aside, there is evidence to suggest that having an HE qualification leads to more positive economic and social outcomes (Bynner and Egerton, 2001).

Aimhigher, therefore, aimed to promote pathways to HE for the groups not traditionally associated with going to university. The initiative was funded until 2011 by HEFCE, with separate strands of provision supported by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Department of Health. The key features of the initiative included a coordinated partnership approach and flexible funding arrangements (Passy, 2011; HEFCE, 2012a). This flexibility allowed partnerships to create original, tailored interventions that responded to local needs; although, ironically, the differentiation made it difficult to measure the effectiveness of Aimhigher (McCaig and Bowers-Brown, 2007).

The work was carried out on the strategic as well as operational levels. Running across 42 partnerships across the UK, Aimhigher worked with 2,700 schools, delivering activities aimed at breaking barriers that may prevent young people

from going to university (HEFCE, 2012a). These activities ranged from aspirational talks to visits to local colleges and universities, from mentoring and providing information, advice and guidance to residential summer schools. The participants of this study experienced different Aimhigher interventions, with the majority of them taking a part in events that took place over several days.

Aimed at learners from disadvantaged backgrounds who had potential to benefit from HE, Aimhigher activities were predominantly delivered in support of the mainstream curriculum. Alongside the main 'bulk' of activity, Aimhigher partnerships provided specialist provision, aimed at supporting the groups, described in policy and practice as 'vulnerable' and 'at risk' (Hardgrove, Enenajor and Lee, 2011), including young people in public care and in alternative education. True to the philosophy of partnership, this provision was designed collaboratively with other stakeholders, such as social services and alternative education providers. Overall, activities for these groups were of more 'intensive' nature, such as three to five day long summer schools, including residential experiences.

While the success of summer schools and their 'high intensity versus low numbers' formula has been relatively well documented (Gorard et al., 2006; HEFCE, 2006; Passey et al., 2009; HEFCE, 2012b), qualitative explorations of specific mechanisms behind this positive impact are thin on the ground. At the same time, evaluations and research that were carried out around Aimhigher interventions are filled with very positive accounts from teachers and young people that point to increased levels of aspiration, motivation and confidence (Kerrigan and Church, 2011). In fact, the initiative has been described in research as "the best government initiative in recent years" (Hatt, Baxter and Tate, 2008, p. 129) and a "turning point" in a life of a young person (Hatt, Baxter and Tate, 2009, p. 333). Feedback like this points to the significant impact on the level of

individual learners, such as a shift in attitude, for example, towards education pathways. Indeed, considering these accounts in the background of lack of evidence of Aimhigher success deemed as unsuccessful is confusing, if not controversial. The answer may lie in the ‘flawed’ measurements tools set out in 2004 with a view to measure Aimhigher impact, which resulted in the ‘wrong statistic’ defining the fate on the initiative (Grove, 2012b).

Despite these controversies, there has been a discussion of a “slimmer Aimhigher 2” soon to emerge, also with a view to addressing issues of social mobility and providing impartial advice and guidance (Grove, 2013). However, although Aimhigher left an obvious gap, it can be argued that the nature of the legacy of Aimhigher has never been fully established due to the mixed messages around its success. In particular, the flexibility of its funding arrangements and partnership collaborations, led to wide variation in activity, which has not been fully captured. Similarly, whilst the evidence points to Aimhigher changing participants’ individual decision making and career routes, the mechanisms behind this claimed transformation have not been explored. This study aims to address this gap by focussing on the elements and mechanisms behind these reported changes. Understanding how Aimhigher could have affected the young people on an individual level can then be used to inform not only Aimhigher’s successor, but also other types of provision for young people. This is not, therefore, an evaluation *per se*, in that the focus is on the young people’s experience rather than the operation of the programme.

Young people looked after and educated outside mainstream education system

Practitioners and researchers tend to get to know young people in care and in alternative education as they come into contact with the ‘system’, be it social services, special educational support, alternative provision (AP) or other

structures. However, their troubles start before – and sometimes long before this encounter. Many of these children come from a life of poverty and deprivation, dysfunctional family relationships, abuse and neglect. Many face stigma and labelling at school and other places; others have to battle it out through education despite having special educational, behavioural and emotional needs, which are often misrecognised and unmet.

Children looked after and educated outside mainstream curriculum may be accessing specialist services for various reasons, which formally differentiates their status and needs. At a closer look, however, these two groups share many characteristics. There is a significant overlap between being in care and having learning difficulties, special educational and emotional needs, having mental health issues and being excluded from school (Brodie and Berridge, 1997; The Poverty Site, 2011; DfE, 2012d). Both groups are at higher risk of suffering from prejudice, stigma and alienation. Both groups are more likely to come from poverty and disadvantage. These risk factors are often interconnected and result in cumulative trauma, affecting the child's life, both present and future. For both children in care and in alternative education, the prospects of negative future outcomes are higher than for their peers, including lower qualifications, higher unemployment, poor mental and physical health, higher rates of alcohol and drug abuse and incarceration. This creates a vicious 'cycle of disadvantage' for these young people (Rutter and Madge, 1976).

Significant efforts have been made in the last thirty years to address this multiple disadvantage. In particular, the changes that followed The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2002, the updated Children Act (2004) and the ECM agenda (2004), followed by the Care Matters: Time for Change (2007) made sure that LACYP are firmly on the local authorities' agenda. The issues around academic underachievement of children in public care were also addressed by introducing

virtual heads and designated teachers (Brodie et al., 2009). Despite these measures, however, children and young people from care background are still statistically worse-off than other children (The Who Cares Trust, 2013). They still continue to significantly underachieve at school; for example, in 2012, less than 15 per cent of looked after children achieved five “good” GCSEs (Higgs, 2012); whilst the figure for children outside the care system is almost 60 per cent (DfE, 2013a; DfE, 2013b). Furthermore, the number of young people in care has been rising. As stated on the NSPCC website (2013), in 2012 the number of young people in England reached over 67 thousand (over 91 thousand in the UK). This number was the highest it had been in fifteen years (DfE, 2012d; Pemberton, 2012).

Similarly, in the last three decades attention has been drawn to the issues around school exclusions, including the work of the Social Exclusion Unit (1997 - 2010). These developments led to the revision of statutory guidance on the matter with a view to readdress the balance of power in favour of the pupils’ rights. However, this development was somewhat overturned by the 2011 Education Act, which shifted the balance of pupils’ rights and decision making in favour of schools and headteachers (DfE 2013c). Indeed, the issue around school exclusions is complex. For example, despite the official statistics showing that the number of exclusion in the UK has been decreasing (The Poverty Site, 2011; DfE, 2012d), there is evidence that suggests that this number may not be correct, as schools abuse “managed moves” and perform “hidden’ exclusions” (Domokos, 2012). The official statistics show that there is a continuously strong link between poverty and having learning difficulties. Pupils eligible for free school meals are four times more likely to get excluded; similarly, learners with SEN are nine times more likely to get excluded (DfE, 2012d). Moreover, there is information that suggests that students with learning disabilities are being excluded on illegal grounds (Murray, 2013).

According to DCSF (2008a), excluded students and those at risk of exclusion represent around 50 per cent of all learners in alternative education. The other half have emotional, physical and health needs, which make it difficult for them to cope in mainstream education. The diverse needs of this population together with very uneven educational support mean that these pupils are at a high risk of “very poor outcomes” (DCSF, 2008a, p. 11). The new statutory guidance, based on the recommendations of the Taylor Review (Taylor, 2012), aims to address the uneven provision for students outside of mainstream education system, and thus improve their educational outcomes. Although the effectiveness of this guidance is yet to be seen, this is a positive step in addressing the gaps in supporting learners with complex needs.

As a result of multiple deprivation, complexity of their needs and lack of support received within the care and the education system, children looked after and educated in alternative settings are exposed to fewer education and training opportunities (Reidy, 2012; Scottish Executive, 2007). Cregan (2008) claims that opportunity and aspiration are, in fact, “two sides of the same coin” in today’s society; where blocked access to opportunity prevents individuals from realising their aspirations. It transpires that the thread of blocked aspirations is somewhat different from the policy language of ‘raising aspirations’ behind Aimhigher (HEFCE, 2012b; Grove, 2011; Alexiadu, 2012). Whilst it is a valid observation, it is equally important to remember that Aimhigher experience was found highly positive and beneficial by many learners and teachers (Hatt, Baxter and Tate, 2008; Hatt, Baxter and Tate, 2009; Kerrigan and Church, 2011).

However, most of the research available on the impact of Aimhigher focused on the work with the pupils in mainstream education. There is therefore a need to examine the work of Aimhigher in delivering tailored provision for vulnerable groups, such as looked after children, learners with learning disabilities and

learners in AP (Rouncefield-Swales, 2009; Kerrigan and Church, 2011). As mentioned earlier in the chapter, parallels can be drawn with research around 'at risk' groups and various types of interventions, such as outdoor activities, which point to a high level of impact on participants (Luthar, 1999; Rutter, 1999).

At this stage, it is important to address the issue of definition of vulnerable groups. The terms 'risk', 'vulnerability' and 'disadvantage' and "marginalisation" are often used to describe young people in public care and outside mainstream education. Indeed, this array of definitions reflects their complex life histories and their complex needs. It is important to be mindful, however, that these definitions don't become "labels that disable" (Rich, 2009). The terms 'vulnerability' and 'disadvantage' are used in this thesis merely to acknowledge the group's societal positioning, rather than to reinforce the negative perceptions and the language of powerlessness (Tupuola, Cattell and Stansfeld (2008).

Indeed, the language adopted in policy and practice is helpful to a point as it reaffirms the entitlement to appropriate support for these children and young people. In this study, the terms 'vulnerable' and 'at risk' is used as an acknowledgment of their early experiences, their impact, and, most importantly, their entitlement to support. At the same time, this recognition should not detract from the participants' entitlement to agency, as well as their natural and developed strengths and achievements – all despite the adversity. In this context, therefore, risk and vulnerability is understood as a "statistical probability of susceptibility to negative outcomes" (Boyden and Cooper, 2007, p.2). This understanding of risk and vulnerability, as opposed to the earlier risk paradigm adopted (Sanders and Jordan, 2000; Porteous, 2007; Hammond, 2011), presents opportunities for further development of meanings around resilience and disadvantaged young people.

The resilience framework

The resilience approach is particularly valuable in understanding the complex experiences of vulnerable young people. It can be argued that due to the recent prevalence of the risk paradigm (Sanders and Jordan, 2000; Porteous, 2007; Hammond, 2011), these young people have not been getting positive representation in policy and practice; neither were they portrayed positively in the media (Hardgrove, Enenajor and Lee, 2011). Examples of young people's accomplishments are still thin on the ground. Vulnerable young people are often portrayed, particularly by the media, as either victims of their circumstances or out-of-control delinquents (Matthews, 2001; McLeod 2007). These trends are not just UK-specific; as the 2003 UN World Youth Report states (United Nations, 2003), adult-oriented construction of childhood, focused on children as future citizens and their 'outcomes', rather than their current realities, is a wide-spread framework across many countries. As a part of wider debate, Uprichard (2008) warns about the limitations of perceiving children as only either 'beings' or 'becomings': a more holistic, transitional view should be exercised.

Research suggests that young people themselves recognise the effect external factors have on their lives; that said, they also acknowledge that there is still the power of own responsibility and choice (Mowlam and Creegan, 2008). This is an important message that conveys that they want to feel empowered: it resonates strongly with the not-so-new but still very current discourse around children as social agents and active constructors of their own lives (Matthews, 2001; Wyness, 1999; Wills et al., 2008). There is a real need for the voice of the young people to be heard, especially of those are considered hard-to-reach due to the constraints of the system.

The contribution of a more authentic child-centred research is therefore invaluable and very timely – if not overdue. For example, work conducted by Schofield (2003) brings the wishes, feelings and the ‘tasks’ of being a fostered child to the forefront of the social work field. The study highlights the importance of such simple but paramount things as love, close and supportive relationships; being a child but yet having to deal with very grown up problems. This message is echoed strongly in the 2011 Munro Review of Child Protection (DfE, 2011a). The review highlights the need to re-evaluate current practices and return to more authentic, therapeutic methods in working with vulnerable children.

Approaching the complex circumstances and needs of the child through the resilience framework allows researchers and practitioners to adopt a more objective, grounded approach by focusing on the interplay of risk and protective factors in the child’s life. Resilience is seen as inseparable from risk, as the latter has to be present in a child’s life, for resilient patterns to occur (Masten and Coastworth, 1998). Resilience, therefore, can be presented as an interaction of resources that act as protective, or risk-mediating factors in a child’s development (Luthar, 2006). Early resilience studies by Rutter, Garmezy, Werner and Smith brought attention to the fact that far from all vulnerable individuals who faced adversity developed negative, or risky life trajectories; some progressed remarkably well ‘against the odds’ (Rutter, 1985, 1990, 1999; Garmezy, 1991; Werner and Smith, 1992). Understood as a dynamic, on-going interaction of the individual with the wider environment, resilience is a complex phenomenon, which promotes holistic understanding of child development. Operating across the domains of the individual, family and community, the resilience framework can be applied to complex multi-faceted processes in inter-disciplinary research and practice (Sameroff and Seifer, 1983; Garmezy, 1991; Masten et al., 1990; Werner and Smith, 1992).

With the potential of the resilience framework to underpin the holistic approach to the experiences and outcomes of vulnerable young people, there has been an increased recognition of its potential in the applied areas of education and social work (Schofield and Beek, 2005). Alongside this growing interest in operationalising resilience, there is a scarcity of research around exploring the role of existing practice-based interventions through the prism of their contribution to resilience building. There is some evidence however, that taking part in extra-curricular activities can act as a protective factor by boosting specific individual characteristics. The latter include self awareness, confidence and self efficacy; there are also observations of increased sense of belonging and improved emotional and mental health (Gilligan, 2000; Newman, 2004; NCH, 2007). These activities can be of various types and designed around sports, arts or outdoor-based pursuits (Coholic, 2011; Carreres-Ponsoda et al., 2012; Thomas, 2012). Within the resilience framework, the change in these characteristics occurs as a result of complex interactions with the outer domains, such as people, events and processes in their family and community environment, including school and the care system. There are, therefore, pockets of research that could feed into the understanding of the mechanisms and processes behind building these domains in young people.

At the same time, the research around Aimhigher impact points to positive changes in learners' attitudes, aspirations, motivation and behaviours (Hatt, Baxter and Tate, 2008; 2009). These findings have also been connected with the notion of a bigger transformation at the level of learner identity (Bloomer and Hodgkinson, 2000). These observations suggest that a further exploration into the impact of activities similar to those organised by Aimhigher may contribute to the understanding of how resilience can be fostered on the operational level.

This brings this discussion to the research questions that determine the aims of the study.

Research questions and aims of the study

The impact of Aimhigher on the individual learner (where learning is everyday activity) and the changes in attitudes and behaviours cannot be explored without taking into account other aspects of the young person's life, that act as risk and protective factors. As research suggests, the meanings of these risk and protective factors are subjective and unique to each individual (Ungar, 2003); there is a need for an investigation into individual meanings of life events. It is therefore important to assess the level and type of impact of any intervention within the much broader framework that encompasses individual experiences as well as their cumulative impact, both positive and negative, on the young person's development and identity formation. Ungar (op cit) highlights the potential of qualitative research methods in highlighting the complexity, as well as the unique nature behind individual journeys. The qualitative method of inquiry is also often associated with researching experiences of vulnerable groups, as it provides richer data, necessary to understand their experiences.

It is also important to point out that the nature of the research has gone through a transformation in the course of the investigation; the changes in the policy landscape have also contributed to positioning, and re-positioning of this study. Started at the time when the future of Aimhigher was not quite known, the study saw the end of the initiative as well as the emerging discussion around its comeback. The research was also being carried out in the background of wider changes in policy and practice, including the increasing numbers of looked after children alongside decreasing resource to support them, as well as measures to address the lack of clarity around AP.

Although the study may have had an evaluative feature initially (while Aimhigher was still running), as it progressed, the analysis of the data collected from the nineteen young people and nine professionals guided the exploration, shifting the focus from the impact of Aimhigher interventions as a stand-alone factor to a more holistic view of young people's experiences of going through life, making transitions through both the education and care system and entering adulthood. This is an important point in understanding the development of the research. Additionally, the rising interest in operationalising the resilience framework with a view to make the services around vulnerable young people more effective makes this study relevant to the practitioners across several fields (Schofield and Beek, 2005). The latter include both state-run and charitable provision set up to support the child, including social work, education, youth work and health services. Therefore, what started as an ambition to position Aimhigher impact within policy-related research with the help of a qualitative method, has ultimately shed light onto very important aspects of young people's journeys, and how they see themselves on these journeys.

Based on these considerations, the focus of the study is threefold. Investigating the impact of Aimhigher activity on the young people's development and resilient patterns implies that a certain change may have had occurred in their attitudes and behaviours. At the same time, measuring any kind of change requires having an understanding of the state of the world before and after. Change is also a process rather than an outcome. In other words, in order to understand change, a certain time frame has to be introduced. This is in line with resilience research, as understanding resilience as a process requires a longitudinal or at least retrospective approach.

At the same time, Aimhigher was by no means a single event within that time frame; notwithstanding of its impact, however powerful or non-existent, the lives of these young people were filled with a multitude of intertwined interactions, which made up their complex life trajectories. For the purposes of this study, therefore, it is necessary to establish the role of the Aimhigher experience in the background of other risk and protective factors, all of which contributed to where the young people are today. As the life trajectories demonstrate (Appendix 1), the relationships between people, events and processes in the young peoples' lives construct a multi-layered picture of one's life journey.

The study, therefore, aims to establish, whether a change has occurred over the course of the established time frame, and the nature of this change. In other words, the first research question can be presented in the following way:

Has there been a change in the young people's lives during the period of time between 'before' and 'after' Aimhigher participation? And if so, what does this change entail?

The potential transformation is explored across several domains, including external factors, as well as individual characteristics. Chapter 6 focuses on the young people's transitions through the care and the education system, as well as their geographical movements and the impact these factors create. The role of other factors, such as relationships, exposure to opportunities and access to support is also explored.

The next step in the exploration is to establish whether Aimhigher experience had any impact on the participants of the study, and how it may have contributed to the wider change. The second research question, therefore, is:

If change occurred, did participation in Aimhigher programme contribute to this change, and in what way? What are the mechanisms behind this process?

In this instance, the impact of Aimhigher can be explored in two ways: first, in terms of Aimhigher fulfilling its remit, as set out by the Labour Government, namely, raising young people's education-related awareness, aspirations and attainment. It is equally important to explore any other impact on the young people, as this is the unknown territory in terms of Aimhigher research. Chapter 7 positions the Aimhigher experience within the wider background of young people's daily interactions with their environments. The investigation focuses on the elements and mechanisms that acted as building blocks of Aimhigher interventions. The impact of Aimhigher in terms of its remit as defined by educational policy is explored; additionally, Aimhigher impact is positioned within resilience research.

The third research question occupies itself with creating an understanding of the explored change within the resilience discourse:

How can the explored change and its elements be mapped across resilience domains and what are the key influencing factors? Is there any evidence that Aimhigher can be a contributing factor in fostering resilience in these young people?

In the answer to this question, Chapter 8 presents the understanding of the young people's journeys through life, by examining clustered risk and protective factors that make up these journeys. Additionally, the role of chains of events and turning points is explored. The understanding of vulnerability and resilience of the young people is also discussed. Finally, and in line with the aims of a professional doctorate, conclusions are drawn in respect to key messages for policy and practice.

2 Theoretical approach

Introduction

As outlined in Chapter 1, this study focuses on the experiences of vulnerable young people, and how these experiences can be interpreted within a resilience framework. Despite on-going attempts in policy and practice to improve the experiences and outcomes of vulnerable children they continue to suffer from disadvantage. This highlights the complexity of the issue and the need to further explore factors and processes that form the ecology around the vulnerable child. It is important to focus not just on the 'why' but also on the 'how' in order to gain in-depth understanding young people's trajectories through life.

A resilience framework allows for such an exploration; it has capacity to bring together biological, psychological and social aspects of a child's development, thus looking at the child's life in a holistic way. A resilience approach also shifts the focus to the potential and the strengths of young people who are considered vulnerable or at risk. This is a refreshing change from a risk paradigm that provided a one-sided view of the already marginalised and often stigmatised groups (Hammond, 2011). This paradigm shift, although a gradual process, also manifests itself in the language around risk and vulnerability; the latter are examined in terms of being susceptible to unfavourable outcomes (Boyden and Cooper, 2007). Thus, resilience presents a combination of resources of a moderating, mediating or protective nature (Luthar, 2006).

This study focuses on the interaction between the young people and their environment, and the meanings attached to this interaction. These meanings affect the attitudes and behaviour, which, in turn, affect future interactions and create new meanings and perceptions of self and the world. The theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism provides a suitable background for this study. Similarly, the resilience approach focuses on the dynamic nature of the interactions between the participant and the world. Both perspectives also favour individuals as active social actors, which is a helpful perspective for a study researching vulnerable young people.

This research has practical implications. Exploring a programme of interventions in terms of its impact on young people's resilience building addresses the existing gap in literature with regards to programmes that contribute to building resilience. This may be due to the fact that the success of most government (and charity-run) initiatives is measured mainly via evaluation-focused assessment. This also relates to literature around Aimhigher initiative, which consists mainly of practice and policy material.

This chapter focuses on the theoretical perspectives for this study, namely, symbolic interactionism and resilience, which frame the research questions and the methodology design. While symbolic interactionism is widely associated with qualitative explorations, most of resilience research has been conducted with the help of quantitative methods. There is, however, a growing interest in qualitative approaches to resilience, to which this study aims to contribute.

In order to frame the research questions, the concept of resilience in vulnerable young people will be explored, including the meaning of risk and protective factors in their lives, as well as the significance of their cumulative effect. These

risk and protective factors are positioned across key resilience domains. Additionally, the connection between resilient development and identity formation is discussed. Finally, this chapter explores the connection between resilience and participation in activities meaningful to the young people.

Understanding resilience

Resilience is described as a biopsychosocial framework, which offers a holistic approach to young people's development (Schofield and Beek, 2005). The origins of the concept of resilience are contested, as well as its definitions and applications. The essence of this currently "fashionable buzzword" (Comfort, Bojn and Demchak, 2010) comes from Latin and translates as ability 'to leap back' (Manyena, 2006). In literature, some authors trace its applications to engineering and physics in reference to material flexibility (Mohaupt, 2008; Szejfman, 2010). Others claim that the concept was initially utilised in ecology, namely, in studies researching ecosystems in post-disaster conditions (Brand and Jax, 2007). In medicine, the term refers to physiological recovery of individuals undergoing a serious illness (Boyden and Cooper, 2007).

Most authors, however, refer to psychology and psychiatry literature in their investigations of resilience and its domains, with the major studies conducted by Garmezy and Rutter (1983) and, subsequently, Werner and Smith (1988; 1990). These studies explored the development of vulnerable young people over time and their coping strategies. In addition, protective factors that counteracted risk and adversity were examined. Rutter (1985) placed particular emphasis on the processes and mechanisms as opposed to single factors; this understanding was particularly valuable for practical applications. As their research revealed that many children achieved higher outcomes despite adversity, the scientists' increasing interest around coping and protective processes spurred on the

paradigm shift from risk to resilience. The latter promotes a holistic approach to events, individuals and processes across several disciplines beyond psychology, including economics and social policy (Boyden and Cooper, 2007; Brand and Jax, 2007).

Although definitions, boundaries and applications of resilience in literature vary, most authors agree on its features. Masten and Powell (2003, p.4), describe resilience as

“...patterns of positive adaptation in the context of significant risk or adversity”.

Other descriptions include strength-based approach, positive youth development, health promotion and health realisation, all of which point to the dynamic nature of this phenomenon (Marshall, 2001). Moreover, the multidisciplinary nature of resilience means that it crosses over fields and theories, including the ecological approach (Christensen, 2010), the life course theory (Elder, 1998; Settersten, 1999), identity theory (Neff and McGehee, 2009; Stets and Burke, 2012) and theory of organisational development (Sroufe, 1979). Interestingly, the multidimensionality of resilience is the framework's asset as well as the source of critique, as it leads to ambiguity and makes difficult to operationalise it (Mohaupt, 2008). At the same time, it can be argued that complex and flexible nature of resilience promotes broader and deeper understanding of certain processes. Resilience can, therefore, be adapted for the needs of a specific practice. For example, studies around resilience of looked after children and care leavers draw parallels with the attachment theory in social work (Schofield and Beek, 2005; Stein, 2005).

The conditions necessary for the presence of resilient patterns are the experience of (multiple) adversity, or risk, and the process of adaptation, or

‘doing ok’ afterwards (Rutter, 1990; 1999). The meaning of ‘doing ok’ is understood in the terms of psychological competence (Masten and Coastworth, 1998), where one’s overall efficiency is considered through the prism of their environment and life conditions. These competencies include, among others, academic (attainment), social (communication, making friends) and conduct (‘fitting in’, adhering to established rules).

Pioneered by Rutter, Garmezy, Werner and Smith, research around resilience in children occupies a large part of literature on the subject, as early experiences are known to affect life course and future outcomes. Despite the view that early trauma and deprivation leads to negative outcomes and creates cycles of disadvantage, research points to some young people demonstrating high levels of competence despite adversity (Rutter, 1985; 1990; 1999). This encouraging evidence addresses the ‘nurture versus nature’ discourse and suggests that an individual can develop various competencies despite (or as a result of) their interaction with risk. This interaction consists of a multitude of unique combinations of factors and processes. The latter are often mapped across three domains: family (for example, parenting style), community (for example, experience of schooling) and personal (for example, temperament) (Sameroff and Seifer, 1983; Garmezy, 1991; Masten et al., 1990; Werner and Smith, 1992). Within a resilience framework, there is, therefore, capacity to explore both structural and individual events and processes. This all-encompassing capacity of resilience allows the researcher to approach the subject’s development and life journey by taking into account all its aspects and thus eliminating potential ‘blind spots’.

Resilience and symbolic interactionism

There are several considerations that this study takes into account; namely, the participants' experiences, which can be interpreted as risk or protective factors; the interaction between the young person and these factors; and the interdependence of these factors. The presence of the internal domain points to the need to allow for subjectivity and variation of attitudes and behaviours, based on the meanings attached to the interactions. Equally, the presence of external domains, such as family and wider ecology call for the understanding of structural processes. In the background of these interactions, the essence and the impact of Aimhigher participation also needs to be explored.

This research, therefore, involves both individuals and structural elements, and their mutual exchange and transformation over time. The interpretivist theoretical perspective allows capturing these elements in a flexible, open-minded manner; it provides the relevant underpinning for this exploration by focusing on both the social and the psychological. Symbolic interactionism places value on the exchange between the social environment and the individual, with the individual's understandings, emotions and behaviour as a key component (O'Byrne, 2011). The perspective promotes research subjects as active agents and has been known to inform data-driven qualitative explorations.

Symbolic interactionism, the "sociological offspring" of pragmatism (Ulmer and Spencer, 1999, p.105), is mainly associated with the work of the 'Chicago school' and, amongst others, George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer (Hammersley, 1989). The interactionist perspective emphasises the dialectic nature of human behaviour by recognising the powers of the social structures, but equally acknowledging the unpredictability of individual trajectories. This dialectic process also implies the presence and interconnection of both continuity and

discontinuity as its building blocks (Strauss, 1993; Jarvie and Zamora-Bonilla, 2011). Therefore, on one hand, the reality and the impact of the social processes and structures are acknowledged; on the other hand, the possibility of new, unexpected human action is recognised.

The recognition of the biological and the social, and their interrelationship is in line with the key principles underpinning the resilience framework, which highlight equal importance of internal and external resilience domains. Acknowledging the potential of the individual creates a certain power balance between people and structures and shifts the attention towards social agency. Indeed, the symbolic interactionist perspective views individuals as social actors operating within structures, but whose behaviour cannot always be predicted and therefore requires an open-minded “documentary” approach (Hammersley, 1989).

This “documentary” approach gives the researcher the opportunity and the tools to draw attention to the experiences of marginalised and vulnerable groups. In this regards the interactionist position

“... speaks for, and to the underdog, who has been otherwise marginalised by society and sociology, dismissed as a ‘deviant’ or reduced to being the ‘product’ of something else. It takes seriously those little things, those ‘ways of life’ that matter to us... It does not try to judge us, or to explain us, but rather to tell our stories”.

O’Byrne (2001, p.159)

O’Byrne’s description is very topical for this study. Despite the growing interest in the experiences of vulnerable groups, including LACYP groups and children in AP, our knowledge and understanding of their lives is far from exhaustive.

Documenting their stories the way they are told has potential to uncover attitudes, behaviours and their unique meanings, which remained unseen in the background of larger systems and structures. Furthermore, utilising the resilience framework in order to explore current interventions and build the future programmes is a new trend that requires attention.

Subjective meanings and symbols are at the heart of the interactionist perspective; they inform the interactions of social actors with their environment. Thinking, or consciousness, is recognised as an interaction with oneself, a process which constitutes interpreting the meanings of symbolic values (Adams and Sydnie, 2001). Exploring the attitudes and behaviours of the young people in the study draws attention to their internal worlds and the variety of meanings they attach to events, processes and other elements. This perspective echoes the notion of subjectivity of risk and protection within resilience framework. In other words, the same event can have multiple meanings (and therefore, impacts). These meanings depend on a multitude of factors, such as the young person's personal characteristics, their family, their school, the care system. The cumulative effect of these factors is also important. As it is not possible to predict the exact outcome of a certain phenomenon, or action, there is an assumption of outcome multifinality. It is the complexity of these multilayered interconnected interactions that constitutes the "complex ongoing activity" according to Blumer (1969, p.85, cited in Adams and Sydnie, 2001).

This reciprocal ongoing activity between the self and society also provides certain insights into the understanding of identity transformation. Stets and Burke (2012) refer to the work of Mead and Stryker (1934; 1980; both cited in Stets and Burke, 2012) in their discussion of identity formation as a process that is grounded in social interaction. This process is linked with self-esteem and self-evaluation, as well as appraisal, motivation and Bandura's self-efficacy (1982,

cited in Stets and Burke, 2012). As identity formation is seen as a part of the interaction between the person and the environment, both agency and structure are equally present and important. As a product of dynamic interaction, identity, or identities are subject to change and transformation. This understanding supports the key principles of the resilience framework (as it is currently understood), and its potential to positively affect one's identity formation by enhancing protective experiences.

As it transpires from the discussion, resilience formation and the interaction between the individual and the environment is complex. Studies occupied with explorations of complex phenomena and insights into individual experiences are generally associated with qualitative methods of inquiry; the same can be said about research grounded in symbolic interactionism (Hamersley, 1989; Ulmer and Spencer, 1999; De Nooy, 2009). Interestingly, however, the use of qualitative methods in understanding resilience is a relatively recent development. As Ungar (2003) points out, the qualitative approach documents the participants' stories by retaining the 'true' (as perceived) meaning of their complex and subjective interactions, which is often lost in quantitative research. Capturing the perceptions of young people in care and alternative education is particularly pertinent as their 'true' experiences are often underexplored due to a number of constraints (Curtis et al., 2004; Hill, 1997).

Resilience, outcome multifinality and organisational model of development

The resilience framework is characterised by the breadth and multidimensionality of its factors and domains (see, for example, Luthar et al., 2000). The cumulative effect of clusters and chains of events that interact with each other over time is of particular importance. These chains of events are in no way linear or equal in impact, as life events occur everywhere and anywhere

in time and space, overlapping, starting, terminating, and starting again, being a part of the 'cause and effect' structures. These "series of contingencies" (Rutter, 1989, p.33) can have a profound negative, or, indeed, positive effect on a child or young person, framing their "distinctive life paths" (Crocket, 1995, p.83).

Sroufe's (1979) organisational model of development offers an insightful way of understanding the relationship between risk and resilience. It emphasises the hierarchical process of adaptation, where reactive patterns of behaviour are 'layered' in a complex, flexible and organised way (Yates, Egeland and Sroufe, 2003). In this context organisation implies incorporation of earlier experiences into the new patterns of adaptation. This view of the resilience construct emphasises the early experiences in child development, which provide an explanation for later coping strategies.

Unique to each participant, these patterns are characterised by discontinuity and subjectivity. In this context, Yates, Egeland and Sroufe (2003) point to heterogeneity and multifinality of developmental outcomes (despite the pathways originating in the same 'place'), as well as their equifinality, whereby unique beginnings can lead to comparable developmental outcomes. Although complex, this is a valuable understanding of the realities of human development. In this study, life trajectory maps were used to analyse and visualise multi-level relationships between events and patterns in participants' lives (Appendix 1).

Risk, resilience and vulnerable young people

Using the resilience framework to analyse a social problem is

“...an ambitious mission, which attempts to marry disparate bodies of knowledge from genetics, developmental psychology, social work, human development and poverty studies”

(Boyden and Cooper, 2007, p.2).

Indeed, the persisting issues around supporting marginalised groups highlight the complexities of the phenomenon. Arguably, the inability of the vulnerability discourse and the deficit model to positively affect the experiences and outcomes of these groups led the need for a new approach. This includes research, policy and practice around tackling poverty, as well as social work (Garmezy, 1991; Saleebey, 1997; Narayan et al., 2000; Mohaupt, 2008; Grey, 2011). Approaches that use resilience, competence and asset discourse as a starting point, therefore, have potential to address that gap.

The shift in research and policy paradigm draws attention to the way risk is understood. For the purposes of this study, the definition of risk suggested by Boyden and Cooper (2007, p.2) seems fitting; risk and vulnerability are seen as a “statistical probability of susceptibility to negative outcomes”. Resilience, then, is understood in terms of resources that carry a moderating, or protective function against these risks (Luthar, 2006). However, as mentioned earlier, resilience can only truly manifest itself when an individual is faced with adversity and risk. Risk and resilience are, therefore, two inseparable phenomena, if not ‘two sides of the same coin’ (Luthar, 2003; Haefel and Grigorenko, 2007).

This understanding of risk and vulnerability alongside recognising young people’s resilient capacity and their social agency offers insights for current

policy and practice. Besides building interventions and services to prevent the risk, provision that focuses on building young people's strengths and resources serves as a counteracting or protective factor against future adversity. However, despite the increasing body of literature that highlights the benefits of the strength-based perspective, the majority of interventions are so far focussed on individual- and family-related problems and deficits (Ungar, 2005; Hammond, 2011). Moreover, the language of the relevant practice and policy needs relevant adjustments. An illustration of this is the notion of "raising aspirations" of disadvantaged groups, which is frequently used in Aimhigher-related policy and practice, as well as media (see, for example, Wintour and Stratton, 2008). Even if well-intended, this description is not necessarily correct; it is also misleading and potentially degrading, as evidence suggests that their aspirations are "similar to other young people" (DfE, 2010).

This discussion highlights the lack of understanding of the experiences, needs and ambitions of certain groups, which can lead to further marginalisation. Support provision, which is designed without the young people's input, and has a linear, task-focused nature, may not be effective, and in some instances, do more harm than good (Hammond, 2005, cited in Schmied and Tully, 2009). In other words,

"...in our haste to change a person's behaviour, we often overlook how their current behaviours make sense to them. Try as we might as adults to guide children, they will not heed our words of advice until they are confident we understand that they are already doing the best they can with what they have".

(Ungar, 2006, p.3)

There has been a gradual change across research, policy and practice, with increasing attempts to include young people's authentic views in scientific explorations, intervention design and policy-related decision making (Franklin and Sloper, 2004; Children in Scotland, 2006; DfE, 2011). It is worth to point out that these developments in the UK are, in fact, a part of a bigger, global trend (see, for example, UNICEF, 2010). Evidence suggests that involving young people in decision making about their services is linked to resilience building. As outlined in the SCIE report (Bostock, 2004), inviting young people in care to define their own outcomes does not only improve the fit of provision, but also contributes to increased levels of self-esteem, self-efficacy and social agency. Apart from highlighting good practice, this example demonstrates how an external factor (creating an opportunity of meaningful participation) causes a positive change in the internal domains (such as self esteem, efficacy and sense of agency).

As mentioned earlier, the inefficiency and insufficiency of the risk paradigm and the deficit model approach called for a new perspective, which would offer new insights to the familiar problems. This shift in thinking can be expressed as a question:

“Are we fixing human problems or developing human resources?”

(Marshal, 2001, p.2)

Understanding resilience in terms of processes and mechanisms behind risk and protective factors provide a necessary bridge from resilience theory to practical applications. For example, research into looked after young people draws attention to the need to promote their resilience in order to moderate the adversity they face early in life (Schofield and Beek, 2005; Stein, 2005). However, recent resilience literature makes it equally important to recognise the potential and the capabilities of those who are often disadvantaged by the society. For

example, Orenstein (2007) speaks of the “imprisoned intelligence” of young people with learning disabilities. In her book *Smart but stuck* (Orenstein, 2007), Orenstein demonstrates how the young people achieve and succeed, thanks to their strengths, and despite their weaknesses.

Similarly, Werner and Smith (1989) speak of young people who are ‘vulnerable but invincible’ (see also Werner, 1996). The authors highlight the variation of children’s trajectories and the interplay of multiple risk and protective factors. This understanding of what is actually meant by ‘vulnerable’, ‘resilient’, ‘invincible’, ‘at risk’ stresses yet again the importance of how research, policy and practice choose to portray certain groups in the society. This study uses the terms ‘vulnerable’, ‘disadvantaged’ and ‘marginalised’

“... interchangeably and only to highlight these youth’s sociocultural, economic and gendered positioning in their communities. They are not intended to reinforce negative generalisations about this population”.

(Tupuola, Cattell and Stansfeld, 2008, p.177)

Indeed, this relativity and subjectivity of risk and protection challenges perceptions and definitions in policy and practice and earlier research. What has been traditionally considered as risk behaviour, or maladaptation, may, in fact, be protective reaction. In this instance, resilience studies that include the socio-cultural context can offer a more in-depth explanation of the phenomena (Luthar, 2003). Tupuola, Cattell and Stansfeld (2008) highlight the importance of contextualising risk and resilience, in order to gain true understanding of risk and resilience in vulnerable groups. In their exploration of life experiences of East London youth, the authors found that despite adversity, many young people seemed well prepared for the risks and displayed resilience that Ungar (2004) describes as ‘hidden’. Some authors, however, warn against the over-exaggerated shift towards the strength-based model, which may lead the overly

optimistic picture of what the young people are capable of (Mohaupt, 2008). Over-reliance on just developing the strengths may lead to the lack of resources to tackle the risks and stresses that are very real in the young people's lives; therefore, both aspects are equally important.

Although severe risk and adversity impact negatively on the young person's development, using elements of managed risk at an appropriate level can, in fact, enhance one's experiences and promote resilience. Exposure to appropriate challenges presents an opportunity for the young people to develop coping mechanisms, exercise sense of mastery and actualise their sense of human and social agency (Newman, 2004). Taking part in activities that present opportunities for challenge and managed risk also help young people to improve their social skills and expand their support networks (NCH, 2007).

Subjectivity of human experiences and relativity of risk and protection also point to the importance of the notion of distance travelled (McNeil, Reeder and Rich, 2012). In other words, the true measure of achievements and successes can only be determined once all other factors are taken into consideration. These insights are vital in creating services and interventions that actually do work, taking into account the individual journey of the child and the unique 'mixture' of needs and talents that this child may have.

Resilience domains: factors and mechanisms

Described as a biopsychosocial model (Schofield and Beek, 2005), the resilience framework operates across several domains, namely, internal, family-related and the domain of the wider environment, including academic attainment, extracurricular activities, and the like. All these factors are interconnected, for

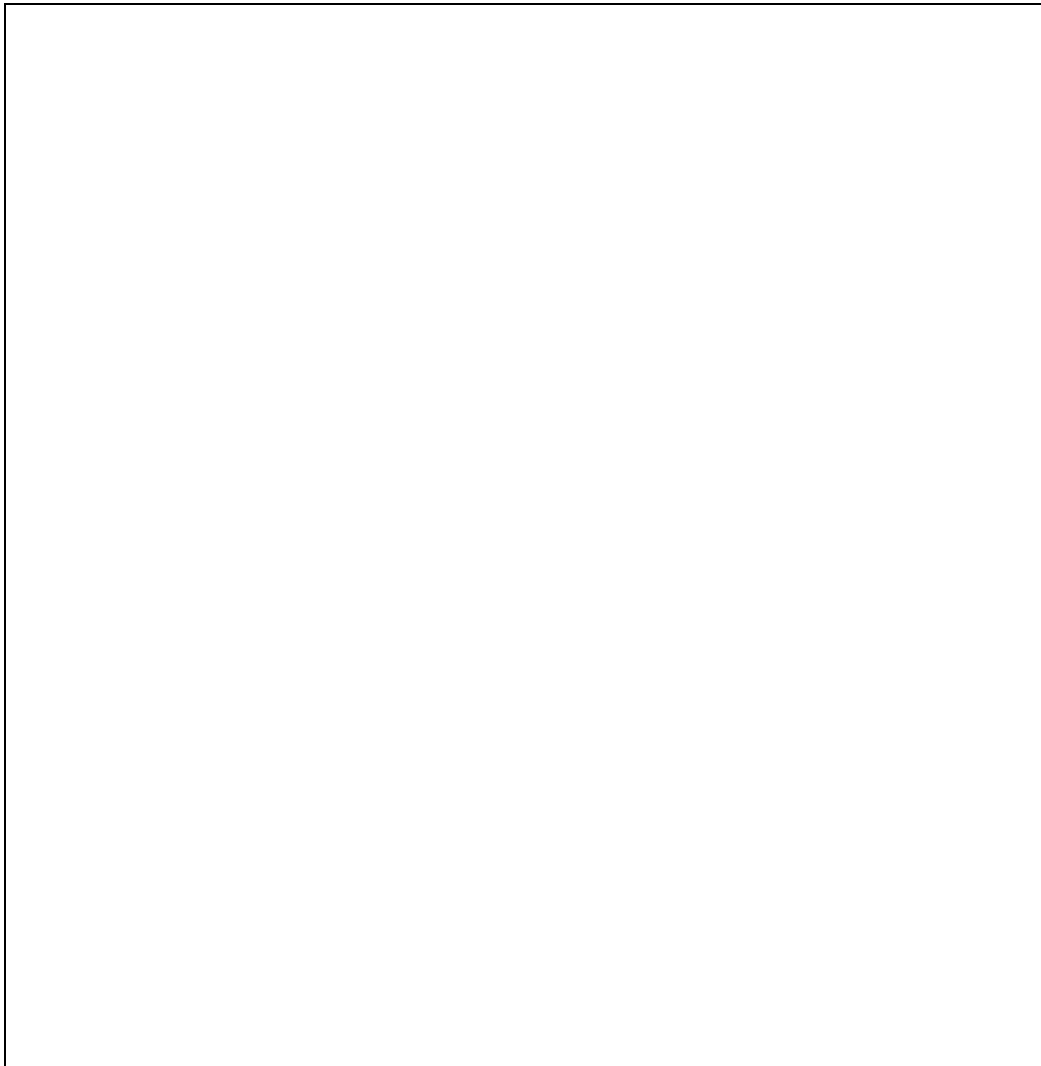
example, living in poverty or trouble at home can affect the young person's attitudes and behaviour at school; similarly, positive family dynamics can have a positive impact on their attachment and academic achievement (Werner and Smith, 1990; Grosnoe and Elder, 2004). Thus, it is important to understand both risk and protective factors in terms of clusters, or chains of events, the cumulative effect of which can often be greater than their sum.

Moreover, the factors and domains alone do not offer the same potential as the dynamic processes and mechanisms that are behind these factors. Indeed, this new shift in focus from identifying resilience to promoting its development has been reflected in recent research (Rutter, 2004; Schofield and Beek, 2005). For this study, it was necessary to map out factors and domains, as well as processes and mechanisms.

Benzies and Mychasiuk (2008) provide a detailed list of protective factors across the three resilience domains, based on Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological model (1979, cited in Benzies and Mychasiuk, 2008). Research in Practice (2009) offers a similar model that is specific to resilience of looked after young people.

Combining the two ensures that the child development theory and the child care perspectives contribute to the understanding of the groups in question. Figure 2:1 provides an adapted version that corresponds with the criteria and domains explored in this study. Of course, it is important to remember that these factors become risks, if inverted. For example, while internal locus of control is associated with resilient development, external locus of control presents a risk factor.

Figure 2:1 Protective factors across three resilience domains (adapted from Benzies and Mychasiuk, 2008; and Research in Practice, 2009)



Family domain

The majority of children grow up within a social institution, represented by their family, foster home or children's home. Daily interactions with this environment have an effect on the way the child sees themselves and the rest of the world around them (Schofield, 2001).

Family-related factors are multiple and complex; they vary from socio-economic status to the relationships between family members; from parent's education to parent's mental health. Stable and adequate income and housing reinforce the sense of stability and ensure there are resources available for the child; poverty and lack of financial resource act as a stressor for the parents and can affect parenting style (Orthner, Jones-Sanpei and Williamson, 2004). Family poverty and disadvantage are often associated with limited access to quality education and healthcare, as well as other provision. This can lead to low attainment and attendance, emotional and cognitive difficulties, substance misuse, child abuse and criminal behaviour (Mistry et al., 2002; Lee, 2003). At the same time, access to consistent quality childcare can improve child outcomes and mediate the risks of financial instability (Mistry et al., 2002; Papero, 2005).

There is also evidence to suggest that housing difficulties are among key risk factors for families on low income; they often have a negative effect on the young people's academic achievement (Yeung, Linver and Brooks-Gunn, 2002). There are also strong links between the number of house moves and the child's performance at school (Ou, 2005). As stability is the "foundation stone" for future success (Stein, 2005, p. 4), children in care and care leavers are at particular disadvantage. Consistent evidence points to the fact that over a third of all LACYP population move placement at least four times (Stein, 2004). Movement and instability affects other resilience domains, such as their educational attainment, friendships and emotional wellbeing.

Nurturing and warm family relationships are a strong protective factor for the young people, which can offset risks such as low socio-economic status (Brennan et al., 2003). Similarly, research conducted by Hutchings and Lane (2005) suggests that children whose parents actively participate in their lives are less likely to manifest problem behaviour and delinquent patterns. Supportive and

encouraging parenting style has been found to off-set the effects of financial stress; it also aids positive adjustment at school, self-confidence and prosocial behaviour (Mistry et al., 2002; Yeung, Linver and Brooks-Gunn, 2002).

Support and encouragement within the family can also mean stimulating environment and developmental opportunities available through parents, siblings, grandparents and members of the extended family. Similarly, the feeling of connectedness, belonging and secure attachment are all protective factors, which can mediate certain risks, such as socio-economic deprivation and psychological distress (Orthner, Jones-Sanpei and Williamson, 2004; Schofield and Beek, 2005).

For the looked after group, their immediate environment can include their family members and foster carers. The structure of these relationships is often complex: on one hand, experiences of contact with birth parents can be very stressful – unsurprisingly given the high proportion of young people in care who have experienced prior abuse and neglect. However, positive contact with family, including siblings and grandparents can expand one's support network and act as a protective factor (Furnivall, 2011; Schofield et al., 2011). Their experience of foster care also varies greatly. In situations where foster placements act as consistent sources of care, support and stimulation, this protective factor can mediate a range of negative experiences (Schofield and Beek, 2005). At the same time, it is not just the question of being matched with a carer who will provide a nurturing and stimulating environment; it is also about having to move out at sixteen or seventeen (Dixon and Stein, 2005). Being parachuted into adulthood presents a major change and challenge for many, affecting young people's access to support networks, education and training opportunities, sending them into disadvantage and poverty (Stein, 2004).

Community / Environmental domain

The child's family or the foster home does not exist in isolation, but is a part of a wider community, including the area, as well as extended family and friends.

Safe neighbourhoods can provide protective environments and, therefore, affect the family life as well as the child's interactions outside their home. According to Gilligan (2000), positive involvement in community matters provides the young person with access to a multitude of valuable resources, including opportunities for skill development, access to healthcare and extended social networks.

Furthermore, it promotes sense of identity, sense of belonging and contributes to development of relational agency, such as helping others.

Outside their home, most adolescents spend their time in school. Quality schooling can act as a protective factor, which has potential to mediate some of the family-related risk factors (Bennett et al., 2005). A positive experience at school includes support and encouragement of teaching staff, which matches the young person's needs; positive friendships and peer acceptance. Academic achievement and an aptitude for a particular skill is also very important (RiP, 2009). All these factors contribute to a child's positive attitude to school and ongoing engagement with education and, ultimately, recognised qualifications (Ou, 2005). It can be argued that all of these factors are equally important; however, it is the academic underachievement, and as a result, poor education and employment outcomes of the disadvantaged groups that make the headlines.

It is argued, however, that it is the lack of understanding of the needs of vulnerable young people, which results in lack of appropriate support. This issue has been consistently documented in the research (Jackson and Sachdev, 2001; Brodie and Morris, 2009; Dyson et al., 2010; Humphrey and Symes, 2010). This

insufficient understanding and support can lead to further stigmatisation and alienation of the children who have already been disadvantaged by society. Indeed, it seems that structural factors continue to determine young people's outcomes, where the young people are denied their chances even at the level of school admissions (Northern, 2011). It can be argued, therefore, that although academic achievement and completing school with qualifications is an important outcome, equal attention should be drawn to all factors that comprise the schooling experience of vulnerable young people. These factors are true determinants of the young person's experience and, therefore, of the outcome of this experience.

Research evidence suggests that young people can also benefit greatly from taking part in extra-curricular activities. Involvement in such activities act as a protective factor as it taps into several positive processes, such as sense of belonging, skill development, identity formation, increased sense of self awareness and self efficacy (Gilligan, 2000; Newman, 2004; NCH, 2007).

Additionally, strong social networks and positive relationships are a powerful protective factor that can offset the effect of a multitude of risks. Having the support of adults and peers not just within, but also outside family or foster home is important. There is also evidence to suggest that as the child enters adolescence, peer acceptance and having the support of professionals at school and other places becomes increasingly important (Criss et al., 2002; Barrett, Sonderegger and Xenos, 2003). Similarly, having a consistent positive relationship with a non-related adult who provides support and encouragement to the young person also acts as a protective factor mediating some of the other risks (Werner and Smith, 2002; Blum et al., 2002)

Support networks and opportunities for meaningful participation

Overall, the resources that can act as protective factors across the family and community domains can be presented as support networks and opportunities. Gilligan (1999, p.187) stresses the interconnection of both aspects, relating it to the experiences of the looked after population:

“When one considers the domains in which a young person in care may live out daily relationships, they include family, care setting, school, peer group, neighbourhood, workplace, and leisure time interests and activities. Each of these domains is a source of potential relationship, which may contribute positively to a young person’s progress while in care”.

Support networks present the basis for developing attachment, fostering social and emotional skills and other important resources. Grosnoe and Elder (2004, p. 574) refer to support networks as “arenas of comfort” which can counterbalance negative factors. These support networks can cross over family or foster home, extended family, peers and friends, as well as non-parental support from other supportive adults, such as teachers, social workers and mentors. Whilst family-type support is important, links to other social support networks become particularly important for adolescents.

Broad and varied support networks may lead to different developmental opportunities, which carry a number of benefits and may just be the key to fostering resilience (Katz, 1997). There is, however, a difference between lack of opportunity and hindered or blocked access to the latter. Poverty and social exclusion, difficulty accessing quality education, healthcare and other services,

instability, complex needs and lack of support often mean that vulnerable young people are not in the position to take the opportunities that are there (Narayan et al., 2000; Creegan, 2008). In this regard, Law (2002) refers to participation deprivation, or occupational deprivation, which is a recognised risk factor for one's health and wellbeing.

Gilligan (1999) argues that experiences of children in care (and therefore, outcomes) can be significantly improved by making sure they have access to developmental opportunities. They can vary in nature, including sporting, cultural and animal care activities and have potential to tap into several resilience domains, including mastery (aptitude for a skill), social competence, sense of purpose and belonging. It can also be argued that the developmental role of extra-curricular and leisure activities is particularly important for those young people who had negative experience in compulsory education. Research suggests that taking part in such activities promotes educational persistence in young people, thus reviving their interest in schooling (Peck et al., 2008). Gilligan (1999) also stresses the importance of supportive adults acting as mentors, guiding the learner through the new activity.

These insights are very valuable, as they present the building blocks of a participatory experience, meaningful to the young person (Law, 2002; Oliver et al., 2006; Jarus et al., 2010). It has to be mentioned here that the term 'meaningful participation' in current literature mainly refers to the youth participation in decision making. In particular, this is reflected in the current policy and practice language (see, for example, Bostock, 2004; Children in Scotland, 2006; DfE, 2011; UNICEF, 2010); this very important development has been discussed earlier in this chapter. There is, however, another definition of meaningful participation, which is more relevant for this study, whereby meaningful participation represents taking part in an experience that has a

meaning for the participant. Used in occupational psychology, this notion of meaningful participation is seen as resilience-building through promoting self-actualisation and fulfilment of one's potential (Law, 2002; Lightsey, 2005; Jarus et al., 2010).

Law (2002) and Jarus et al. (2010) stress the fact that many disadvantaged and marginalised groups have the right but not the access to the full, unabridged involvement in

“...life situations, which occurs across many locations, including environments of work, school, play, sport, entertainment, learning, civic life and religious practice”

(Jarus et al., 2010, p. 345)

The authors define meaningfulness in terms of the fine balance between the challenge presented by the task and the level of skill possessed by the actor. This notion echoes the concept of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD, in Langford, 2005), whereby the activity encourages the learner to go outside their comfort zone and thus expand their skill base. Edwards and McKenzie (2005) claim that most meaningful learning occurs outside formal structures (such as classrooms), as rules and regulations constrain the expansion of ZPD. Such activity can be a challenge at first and should be supported by a skilled empathetic mentor; however evidence suggests that taking managed risks is developmental and leads to increased self awareness, confidence and transferrable competence (Stott and Hall, 2003; Newman, 2004; Buckingham Shum and Deakin Crick, 2012).

The notion of being immersed in meaningful participation has also been connected to the understanding of 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi and LeFevre, 1989, cited in Law, 2002). The participant experiences a sense of challenge and a sense

of mastery, which is connected to feeling of choice or control of the situation. Clearly set goals, connectedness (to a supportive environment and a supportive mentor) and orientation on the current task contribute to the sense of enjoyment and satisfaction (Jarus et al., 2010). Thus, the mechanics of participating in a leisure activity demonstrate how taking part in something meaningful contributes to the young person's emotional and mental wellbeing.

Research points to benefits of meaningful participation, including development of new skills, increased confidence, social competence and sense of agency. Oliver et al. (2006) report that this enhanced sense of meaning, connectedness and agency contribute to building resilience through the processes of developing initiative and emotional regulation, as well as broader identity transformation. Edwards and McKenzie (2005) highlight that meaningful participation fosters relational agency, which is expressed as increased willingness and capacity to contribute. The authors claim that the latter connects to a wider sense of self-efficacy and confidence; it is also instrumental in developing purposive identities.

Individual domain

The discussion around meaningful participation provides a detailed illustration of the interaction between the individual and the activity they engage. This interaction is multifaceted: while it is evident that environments impact on people's attitudes and behaviour, the young person's individual characteristics also affect the interaction with the environment (Scarr and McCartney, 1983).

As outlined in Figure 2:1, internal characteristics present the third resilience domain, namely, such qualities and skills as temperament and emotionality; locus of control, social competence, self-awareness and self-efficacy. The child's

academic performance and skills also play an important role in resilience building. This factor, although 'located' within the individual, can (and should) be fostered through meaningful activity that matches the participant's needs and interests (RiP, 2008). Education, training and skills are closely linked to the chances of stable employment and financial stability. The latter is also a determinant of one's emotional wellbeing as financial strain represents a key stress factor. While the issues around academic underachievement of vulnerable groups are well documented (Jackson and Sachdev, 2001; Brodie and Morris, 2009; Dyson et al., 2010; Humphrey and Symes, 2010), some of them do well in school. The experiences of high achievers involve high rates of attendance, having a supportive adult, positive peer influences and early learning support (RiP, 2008). This observation echoes the stories of several young people in the sample (Chapters 6 and 7). Those who seem to have achieved most academically had several other protective factors in their lives.

Additionally, an aptitude for a certain skill (or skills) is recognised as a protective factor, connected to the sense of mastery, self-esteem and self-confidence (NCH, 2007). The focus here is on practical 'hands-on' skills that can be exercised through school-based and leisure activities, such as playing football or drawing. Equally, soft skills are of great importance to the young people's resilience building. The Young Foundation (Roberts, 2009, p.14) suggests the acronym *SEED* as an overarching term for the 'soft' competencies that are key to developing 'grit', the term that echoes resilience. These are: social and emotional competence (including self-awareness, social awareness and social skills); emotional resilience (ability to cope); enterprise (creativity) and discipline (both internal (motivation) and ability to cope with externally imposed discipline).

The SEED characteristics echo the internal characteristics in resilience literature. For example, locus of control, which is sometimes referred to as self-agency, is

connected to self-esteem and effective coping (Bandura, 1997). Locus of control is associated with the individual's perception of where the responsibilities and the resources for a certain event are positioned (inside, or outside the individual). Young people who have internal locus of control hold the belief that they have the resource to change their circumstances and create their own destiny (Juby and Rycraft, 2004). As described in Chapter 8, some of the young people in this study report an evident shift in locus of control and sense of agency.

Similarly, high levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy are associated with resilience building. For example, in the study conducted by Wong (2003) adults with learning disabilities were considered more resilient when they approached difficulties with a belief that they possess the necessary skills and abilities. Self-efficacy and sense of purpose have also been linked to having a belief system, which provided individuals with a sense of belonging and acted as a protective factor (Juby and Craft, 2004).

Likewise, social and emotional competence is another important building block of resilience (Garmezy, 1991; Garmezy and Rutter, 1983; Haefl and Grigorenko, 2007). Children who possess adequate social skills and exhibit positive emotionality find it easier to generate and maintain positive relationships and cope with adversity. These skills can also be enhanced through external protective factors, such as positive interactions with supportive adults, peer acceptance and friendships, exposure to stable loving environments and participation in stimulating social activities (Benzies and Mychasiuk, 2009; RiP, 2009; Roberts, 2009). Temperament and positive emotionality have been linked to emotional competence, or emotional intelligence, and constitutes an important protective factor (Edward and Warelow, 2005). At the same time, negative emotionality is considered a risk factor (Masten and Garmezy, 1990;

Masten and Coatsworth, 1998). For example, Mancini and Bonanno (2009) claim that positive emotions and positive memories (together with low-level attachment anxiety) increase the resilience to loss of a loved one and improve coping.

Understanding the impact of emotional competence and wellbeing on life experiences and outcomes of children and young people should not be underestimated. According to RiP (2009), there has been an overall increase in adolescent depression in the recent decades. Apart from the adversity that vulnerable young people go through, the reasons for this increase may lie in the young people feeling powerless about their life circumstances. In line with these findings, Chapter 6 provides detailed accounts of young people feeling angry and emotional about their circumstances. As mentioned earlier, however, internal locus of control and positive emotionality can be fostered through the provision of protective interventions, which give the young people a sense of meaning and fulfilment.

Factors and domains versus mechanisms and processes

Following the accumulated knowledge around factors and domains that constitute risk and resilience, the discourse is now focusing on the processes and mechanisms that make up complex interactions of multiple factors and domains (Schofield and Beek, 2005). These processes and mechanisms can then be incorporated in the existing and emerging service provision, including education, social and health care and leisure activities. By applying the resilience framework in this way, it is possible to link up the knowledge about risk and resilience with the concepts informing the current practice, including child development, transitions through adolescence, care and education and attachment. This way

the factors, domains, events and processes are understood as a dynamic whole, which makes up the young people's life trajectories.

Events and processes can be of different nature and strength. Rutter (1996) identifies independent and non-independent events in a child's life. For example, a death of a close family member is an independent event (as described in Chapters 6 and 8). Consequently, a change in behaviour following that event, and as a result, a school exclusion form a chain of non-independent events, caused (at least to a point) by an independent event. Similarly, an independent event of meeting new people during an Aimhigher residential can result in increased social competence and new positive friendships. As the nature and impact of each event vary, some events act as turning points and have a dramatic impact on the young person's life trajectory. These turning points can have a long-lasting effect; they can either promote or truncate other opportunities.

Turning points also have potential to cause transformation on deep individual level, including a young person's beliefs, attitudes and perceptions (Rutter, 1996). For example, as shown in Chapter 8, turning points can vary from having to work at a factory after leaving care to moving back to reunite with one's support network; or, indeed, taking part in an Aimhigher activity. Understanding the potential of turning points also illustrates how "late bloomers" can successfully transition into adulthood despite years of severe adversity and disadvantage (Masten, 2013).

These insights confirm yet again the need to understand resilience as a process and to view resilience outcomes as a part of developmental perspective. The latter should be used to inform current and future interventions designed to assist young people in their development. According to NCH (2007, p.6), the

most successful interventions are grounded in the understanding of this complexity; they combine the elements of risk prevention, asset strengthening and orientation on protective processes:

“Multisystemic interventions involving a mixture of risk, asset and process-focused targets located at the child, family, and community level hold the most promise”

These interventions differ depending on the developmental stages of the child and as a result employ different elements. For example, for an adolescent, interventions should focus around relationships with supportive adults at home and in educational setting; positive school and out-of-school experiences; opportunity to develop relational agency (‘to make a difference’) and exposure to managed risks in order to reframe adversity and develop coping skills (NCH, 2007). This description echoes the elements and mechanisms in the design and delivery of Aimhigher activities, as Chapter 8 describes.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the meanings of resilience and risk in child development and possible applications of the resilience framework in current practice. The understanding of resilience went through a transformation, from resilience seen as hardiness and invincibility, to resilience as a dynamic process, capacity for change, potential for growth. This transformation caused a gradual shift in the way vulnerable and marginalised groups in the society are currently understood, where risk behaviours are seen as adaptation to the environment. Using the resilience approach to inform the design of new interventions and for evaluation of the existing provision promotes a child-centred approach by focusing not just on risk prevention, but building the child’s strength and potential.

The interplay between risk and resilience domains is complex, subjective and potentially difficult to predict. Within a symbolic interactionist perspective, the young person's life trajectory is constructed through the interactions with the environment and the meanings that the young person attaches to these interactions. The latter are mapped across individual, family-related and community-based resilience domains. All three domains contain risks and protective factors and are closely interwoven, thus creating a cumulative effect on the child's life experiences and development.

However, these factors and domains are never static; they are part of complex processes and mechanisms that make up the life trajectory of the young person. Viewing the child's life course as a combination of factors, events and processes provides a holistic understanding of the young people's past, present and, potentially, future. Of course, it is impossible to change the past; however, it is possible to affect the present and, therefore, the future by building in mechanisms that help young people build their own adaptive and protective skills. Research demonstrates that adversity can be reframed by shifting the balance and adding to the accumulation of protective factors in the young people's lives. These can range from supporting and fostering relationships, to improving access to opportunities.

Similarly, exposure to managed risks and appropriate challenges has a positive effect on the young people's capacity to develop their own resources. Vygotsky's ZPD approach offers an explanation of how this can be achieved on the practical level. Additionally, involvement in appropriate challenge is closely linked to the notion of "flow", which, again, is invaluable for operationalising resilience. Elements of this process are discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

Alongside these developments in both research and practice it is worth noting that the experiences of many vulnerable young people are still challenging and difficult. Some make the most of their circumstances and keep going despite adversity; Masten (2013) describes them as “late bloomers”. It is equally important, however, to acknowledge how poorly supported many of them are by the existing services. This is reflected in official statistics, as well as in research. Publication titles, such as “Smart but stuck” (Orenstein, 2012) speak for themselves, pointing to the type of experience the young people have within the system.

The next chapter focuses on the provision designed to address educational disadvantage of vulnerable groups and the Aimhigher initiative.

3 The Aimhigher initiative

Introduction

The thesis explores life experiences of vulnerable young people and, in particular, the contribution that Aimhigher experience may have had for these young people's resilient patterns. Following the discussion around theoretical underpinning for this study, this chapter focuses on the Aimhigher context, namely, the origins of the initiative, its ethos and its operating principles.

Aimhigher was designed as an integral part of a wider policy agenda aimed at tackling social and educational inequality. Ended by the Coalition Government in 2011, the initiative has left a somewhat mixed legacy in relation to actual versus intended outcomes. Despite a plethora of national and local reports on making a difference to learners, and high regard amongst practitioners, Aimhigher and its architects were criticised for not reaching the WP targets (Chilosi et al., 2009).

At the same time, some argue that Aimhigher did make an impact and owes its closure to the "wrong statistic" used to measure participation in HE (Attwood, 2010a; 2010b; Boffey, 2011). Additionally, despite Aimhigher ceasing to exist in 2011, a large part of outreach work continued in the universities as a part of Fair Access agreement (Harrison, 2012b; OFFA, 2013). However, the lack of impartiality of this provision in the new competitive HE climate and stagnated

social mobility pointed to the need for impartial HE-related advice (Grove, 2012a; Atherton, 2012a, 2012b, 2013; Grove, 2013). The undefined nature of Aimhigher legacy and its rumoured comeback offer an opportunity for an exploration of the principles and mechanisms behind Aimhigher.

Designed around HE progression and based on partnership collaborations, Aimhigher targeted young people through the education system (predominantly schools and colleges). For adolescents, transitions through the education system are associated with certain milestones, determined by the system structure. Within compulsory education, this includes going between primary and secondary, and secondary and high school. These education-related thresholds coincide with other transitions and milestones, positioned in the sociological and psychological domains (Rutter, 1996). The recognition of Aimhigher contributing to the wider processes in a young person's life is crucial for this study, as it explores Aimhigher experience in conjunction with other events and processes.

With the public sector still reshaping and the likelihood of the comeback of Aimhigher's successor, it is important to reflect on the Aimhigher experience in order to identify and transfer expertise accumulated between 2004 and 2011. This chapter explores the key elements and mechanisms of the initiative at strategic, operational and learner level. Although some of the outreach activity has been sustained under the universities' outreach remit, this chapter focuses on Aimhigher activity that was funded by the Labour Government between 2004 and 2011.

Most literature on Aimhigher consists of evaluation reports, compiled by practitioners and focused on the set targets. It seems that the scope of the literature is rather narrow and is mostly shaped by the policy language. There are

also a few critiques focusing on the wider socio-economic landscape in relation to Aimhigher agenda. The same trend can be detected in literature that attempts to investigate impact of Aimhigher activities at the level of identity and overall individual development. With regards to vulnerable young people, there are various sources pointing to Aimhigher engaging with these groups; however, it is inconsistent and is mostly practitioner-led, including internal reports and newsletters. There is, therefore, a gap in research around Aimhigher impact on vulnerable young people, which this study aims to address.

Widening participation as a response to the inequality gap in education

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the UK education system has been marked by the long-lived impact of the social class inequality, at the level of access, participation and future outcomes. In particular, the HE landscape, rooted in the British compulsory schooling system, draws a dramatic picture of differentiation and division between experiences of learners from upper and lower social groups (Gorard et al., 2006). Furthermore, some authors argue that the way the UK education system operates has a negative impact on the identity and esteem of learners from working class background. For many of them, seen through a lens of social, economic and cultural barriers, entering HE represents higher risks of failure and loss over a chance of opportunity and gain (Reay, 2001; 2006).

Concerns over widening participation therefore have deep cultural and political roots. Indeed, the history of compulsory education in the UK can be seen as one of increasing access (to education) for marginalised social groups, most obviously via the introduction of compulsory state schooling in the 1870s. The 1944 Education Act represented a major milestone in seeking to increase social mobility through the introduction of grammar schools, and academic attention

over the next fifty years was, to a very great extent, concerned with the extent to which the schooling system and culture facilitated this mobility.

The most recent manifestation of this discourse emerged in the early 1990s, as a reaction to the stark warnings of growing marginalisation and social exclusion of certain groups in society in the post-1980s Britain. Early stages of the process saw Helena Kennedy QC arguing the case for disadvantaged learners and truncated opportunities before the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC, 2000). A strong case was made for the benefits of continuing learning post-16 and career opportunities for those at most disadvantage in the society. This development promoted stronger links between ‘layers’ of the education system (compulsory, FE and HE), thus creating “a climbing frame of opportunity” (Kennedy, 2009, p.1) and shaping the foundations for what is now known as ‘lifelong learning’.

WP is described as a framework within education policy aimed at triggering social and cultural change (Taylor et al., 2009; Universities UK, 2003). In more practical terms, it shaped an operational strategy, which encompassed

“all those activities undertaken by HEIs and FECs, both individually and in partnership, to widen access to HE for those from under-represented and disadvantaged groups, including those on vocational programmes” (HEFCE, 2006, p.9).

Initiated by the Labour Government as Partnership for Progression (P4P), and then the Excellence Challenge (EC), the WP agenda set a target of increasing HE participation of under-represented groups to 50 per cent by 2010 – by working towards fair access yet maintaining high educational standards (Universities UK,

2003). Although the composition of the underrepresented population varied over the 'life course' of the WP agenda, learners from the background of multiple disadvantage have always featured strongly (Waller, Hatt and Harrison, 2010; Harrisson, 2012).

The WP discourse divided opinions into those dominated by the social justice view and those driven by exclusivity and high standards of HE. The new approach meant that the HEIs would have to change in order to become attractive, and useful, to the new generation of applicants – those with no family history of HE. It would also imply colleges and universities adopting a different model of admission and overall operation, allowing recognition of their learners' non-traditional, vocational strengths and assets.

This change was driven by DfES (2003b, p.5) guidance, whereby "the opportunity to enter HE should be open to anyone who has the potential to benefit from it, regardless of background". This expansion of the education system promised to bring down social barriers. The new ways of working together meant closer links with the wider community. Cross-sector and in-sector collaborations and the focus on the learner would call for better alignment between strategies employed across compulsory, further and higher sectors (HEFCE, 2001b).

Those who resisted the idea of WP, referred to 'social engineering' as opposed to 'social mobility', and insisted that not only there was no sufficient evidence that WP could fix social exclusion, it most definitely would be costly. The Conservative party claimed it would abandon the initiative, as it had several weaknesses and could result in discriminating against learners from independent schools in the chase to accommodate the underprivileged (Curtis, 2004; Kallenbach, 2003;

Smithers, 2004). Ironically, perhaps, the recent messages in the media suggest that an Aimhigher-like initiative is being devised in order to address the issue of social mobility (Grove, 2012a; Atherton, 2013; Grove, 2013).

Further criticisms included the “university education is not suited to all” (Taylor et al., 2009, p.4) view, strongly supported by the Conservative party, and the creation of what was referred to by some as ‘Mickey Mouse degrees’ (Brookes, 2004) in place of the already existing vocational provision at Level 4. It was claimed that the job market would not cope with the high numbers of graduates against lack of graduate opportunities and unfilled vocational positions. Those in favour of WP used a free market analogy, where choice and competition, demand and supply act as self-regulators. With students paying for their education, as initially proposed in the Dearing Report 1997, the quality of the products (qualifications) and services (teaching, academic and welfare support) would be driven by diversity (Clare, 2003). It was also argued that the WP agenda contributes to the citizenship framework by offering knowledge and transferrable skills that promote social awareness, broader life vision, adaptability and self-fulfilment (Clarke, 2003; HEFCE, 2001a; 2001b; Stuart, 2002).

Aimhigher initiative

Although the 1990s saw an increase in undergraduate student numbers as the result of the WP developments, the increase for groups identified as underrepresented in HE was still insignificant. Within regional and local variation, some areas were being referred to as “HE deserts” in practice-related documents (Aimhigher South East, 2005).

Following the White Paper '*The Future of Higher Education*' (DCSF, 2003), Aimhigher was established as

“a national collaborative programme, which aims to widen participation in a HE in England by raising awareness, aspirations and attainment among young people from under-represented groups (particularly lower socio-economic groups and the disabled)”

(Thomas, 2011, p. 231)

At the forefront of the WP agenda, Aimhigher mainly focussed on the pre-entry (into HE) level of activity. Funded until 2011 by several government bodies, including HEFCE, BIS and DoH, the programme operated across the three tiers of national, regional and local provision. Aimhigher performed a role of a broker, bringing sectors and institutions together through establishing partnerships with schools, colleges, LAs, voluntary and private sector. The key features of the initiative included a coordinated partnership approach and flexible funding arrangements (Passy, 2011; HEFCE, 2012a). Although the programme was criticised for its relatively rigid structures and expectations coming from “the top” (Atherton, 2013), the flexibility of funding arrangements allowed partnerships to create original, tailored interventions that responded to local needs (although, ironically, the differentiation made it difficult to measure the effectiveness of Aimhigher, McCaig and Bowers-Brown, 2007).

Aimhigher activities

Both national guidance and local variations informed targeting, design and delivery of Aimhigher activities. Interventions differed in type of intended impact, intensity and length, age group and group size and facilitator input. The activities included summer schools, university campus visits, mentoring schemes, masterclasses and tutor sessions, roadshows, subject tasters and informative or inspirational talks (see, for example, Hatt, Furniss and Tate, 2010; Kerrigan and

Church, 2011). Summer schools, university campus visits and mentoring schemes were considered to have the most impact. Some innovative and exciting examples listed on the Aimhigher website (2011) include the Raise Your Game motivational programme (Aimhigher Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire), HEAT Higher Education Awareness Trail (Aimhigher Peninsula), T4T Toolkits for Transition (London East Thames Gateway Aimhigher Partnership) and Aiming for Life Skills (Aimhigher Twin). Hatt and Austin (2005) underline the importance of undergraduate “ambassadors” as role models for the young people, claiming that “the messengers are the message”. The authors state that Aimhigher’s success is partly due to being “outside” the learners’ day-to-day environment.

There is significant evidence in local and national area reports pointing to the high impact and popularity of summer schools. Their success was defined both in terms of participants’ feedback and Aimhigher partnerships’ methods of delivery (Pennel, West and Hind, 2005; HEFCE, 2006; Hatt, Baxter and Tate, 2009). Between 2008 and 2010, a funding sum of £10.5 million was allocated by HEFCE for this “key outreach activity” (HEFCE, 2008, p.2). It is worth noting that many universities had been running summer schools and similar activities (other names include ‘summer camps’ and ‘academies’) before the formation of Aimhigher (Universities UK, 2003; Harrison, 2012). The focus of this WP initiative, however, was providing impartial (not focused on a particular institution) IAG via interactive in-depth experience of being a HE student.

Summer schools are mostly aimed at learners at key transition stages (pre-GCSE level or A-level or equivalent) with the potential to have an impact at the time of making choices and considering one’s future. Summer schools were mainly focused around a certain subject area and last from three to seven days; they could be residential or non-residential. As the majority of this type of summer

activity concentrated on learners recruited through the 'mainstream' school channels, learners from vulnerable groups were included in the event cohort automatically. There is also evidence of projects that were opened to students from both within and outside of mainstream education: for example, Aimhigher Lincolnshire and Rutland ran a Robot Competition, designed to promote engineering progression routes, particularly to female learners; the project welcomed teenagers from both local schools and PRUs (Slack and Vigurs, 2006).

In addition, a relatively small part of Aimhigher activity was designed and delivered specifically to meet the needs of vulnerable young people. Various Aimhigher-related sources demonstrates that several areas were engaged in running summer schools for LACYP groups (Aimhigher partnerships in Leicestershire (Kerrigan and Church, 2011) and Gloucestershire (University of Gloucestershire, 2010); summer activities designed for learners from BME background (University of Manchester, 2010) and events built around learners with learning difficulties and disabilities (Middlesex, Skill, 2007).

In the process of gathering literature for this study, there was an overall sense of specialist Aimhigher-facilitated provision being 'out there'. However, it was difficult to establish its scale due to lack of coherent and systematised information on the subject. Despite summer schools being held in high regard with both recipients and policy makers, research is scarce and is mainly of evaluative nature. Beyond that, McLinden (2003) and Knox and McGillivray (2005) provided useful insights into staff and student perceptions; Hatt et al. (2009) explored the long-term impact of summer schools on participants' future choices and progress.

Apart from summer schools, university campus visits and mentoring schemes have been named amongst the top three Aimhigher activities in terms of impact (Passy, Morris, and Waldman, 2009). Campus visits involve large numbers of learners (thus targeting a larger part of the cohort) with a relatively low level of intensity (awareness raising level), whereas mentoring schemes are characterised by high intensity and low numbers. Literature on mentoring provides evidence of improved motivation, behaviour and attendance, boosted self esteem, higher social competence skills (MBF, 2010; Kingston, 2008). For example, Aimhigher Hertfordshire facilitated a project as a part of the National Mentoring Scheme, which included students with disabilities, young carers, learners at risk of disengagement and those excluded. The participants reported a positive attitudinal change in attainment and attendance; this was reflected in their grades and overall performance. Other benefits included improved planning skills and belief in own potential (Roberts and Weston, 2011).

Following the reported impact of mentoring-like interventions, the Aimhigher Associate scheme was founded in 2008 under the Aimhigher 'umbrella'. The programme combined several principles of WP and mentoring, by enabling undergraduates to support learners at pre-entry level in a mentoring capacity. The emphasis was made on both mentors and mentees sharing a similar background, aimed at building on the 'relatability' factor. According to Roger and Burgess (2011), despite some positive outcomes, such as learners' improved awareness of post-compulsory options, the evaluation reported inconclusive results with regards to the participants' ambitions to progress onto HE. These findings echoed the overall verdict with regards to the impact of Aimhigher (Waller, Hatt and Harrison; 2010 Harrison, 2012; Atherton, 2013).

Targeting and cohort

Aimhigher was envisaged as a targeted initiative: in order to contribute to social inclusion, those excluded from education and other opportunities needed to be identified (Hatt et al., 2008, p. 135). The key criteria for Aimhigher participation were identified using national deprivation indices and central government policies (HEFCE, 2004). The targeting mechanisms were later heavily criticised; as it transpired that the lack of clarity around the indicators contributed to the Aimhigher funding being discontinued (Waller, Hatt and Harrison, 2010; Harrison, 2012a). It is important to mention that although the key criteria for the participation remained throughout the course of the scheme (2004-2011), some of the characteristics of the targeted Aimhigher cohort underwent alterations. Cohort eligibility is crucial to this discussion, as it translates into access to opportunities for real individuals, and in particular, vulnerable young people.

Locally, Aimhigher partnerships operated with 'postcode maps' of cohort concentration (HEFCE, 2004). The concentration landscape varied, from hundreds of students concentrated across two schools, to a thousand Aimhigher learners 'scattered' across several institutions. The funding was allocated according to the estimated cohort size. To demonstrate the scope of the operation, forty-two Aimhigher partnerships carried out work across 2,700 schools, which included 188 Academies and 414 primary schools (HEFCE, 2012b).

The Widening Participation review (HEFCE, 2006) refined the targeting and cohort guidelines for Aimhigher partnerships, which focused on:

- Groups from lower socio-economic groups (identified as groups 4-8 in the NS-SEC;
- Those characterised by multiple deprivation (socio-economic disadvantage, living in a deprived area featuring lack of HE participation);

- Learners with disabilities, SEN or SpLD;
- LACYP groups.

Although targeting was defined at the policy level, identification of individual students was more complex at the operational level, as relying on the pupils' reports of their parents' income or occupation proved ineffective (there was a high risk of it being incorrect). Another consideration was the ethics around asking the young people to declare these details. This resulted in a new guidance from HEFCE (2007) for HE providers and Aimhigher partnerships to take charge of the final stage of the cohort identification. Postcode clusters (representing areas of deprivation) were aligned with a more localised, qualitative approach. As a result some areas adopted a method based on Bordieu's concept of cultural capital, where all learners with no family history of HE participation were included in the cohort. Although not a false method as such, this meant that the cohort may be too large for the funding size, and thus reduce the per-learner entitlement (Hatt, Baxter and Tate, 2009). Aimhigher South West presented a triangulated approach of a cohort identification approach, which was also utilised in other Aimhigher Partnerships and combined both quantitative (Fischer Family trust data on predicted GCSE attainment; Standard assessment tests at KS 2) and qualitative measures. The latter were based on professional judgement of teachers and constructed around the 'positive learner identity' (Hatt, Furness and Tate, 2010).

Qualitative mechanisms grounded in the teachers' understanding of positive learner identity as a way to Aimhigher cohort identification deserve further attention. At the level of the individual learner within the cohort, the aspect of professional judgement in the school or college proved to be a stumbling block, and a revelation. One of the 'soft' criteria for selecting a pupil for the cohort was, as stated on the HEFCE website (HEFCE, 2012a) was this pupils' "potential to

enter HE”, which may be hindered by underachievement, lack of confidence, multiple deprivation and other barriers. This description brings in certain subjectivity into the process of defining one’s eligibility. While it can be argued that criteria such as a learning disability, receiving FSM or being in care are more transparent, someone’s potential to go to university invites individual interpretation and can be rather elusive. Of course, having flexibility at teacher level can be extremely helpful, as this promotes the child-centred approach. It is logical to assume that teachers may be best placed to link the child’s needs to the available opportunities (compared to the postcode data). At the same time, the same principle can be counterproductive and leave certain children out, if the staff do not have the knowledge or understanding of the child’s needs.

Another important aspect of identification was ‘allocating’ the appropriate level and intensity of activity to different students. A one-day university visit varies greatly in purpose and impact from a three-month mentoring scheme; in the same way, a three-day residential may be beneficial to a young person, who will not benefit in the same manner from attending a one-hour activity. Professional judgement would also play a crucial role here as teaching staff are in the position to assess the young person’s dispositions and needs. Various approaches have been utilised within local area partnerships. Kewin, Hughes and Sheen (2010) mention the use of the “red, amber, green” model in their action research, as a method of “coding” the level of interventions to support the progression trajectories of learners on Apprenticeship course.

The notion of inclusion (into the Aimhigher cohort) has also caused some confusion and resistance amongst participating schools and colleges. This complexity came from different, if not opposing, understandings of inclusion. As described by Hatt, Baxter and Tate (2008), schools and colleges saw ‘inclusion’ as an approach that would allow the whole class to participate in an activity.

Overall, targeting remained a contentious issue for Aimhigher throughout the Aimhigher term, characterised by the increasingly positive image of the initiative (Hatt, Furness and Tate, 2010) the duality of the meaning of inclusion, and the pressure from the funders to demonstrate progression of the 'right' (eligible) type of learner.

Having potential as a prerequisite for inclusion in the cohort

Identification of those who have potential to benefit from HE is, at least on some level, subject to the perceptions of those in charge of finalising that selection. Having the potential may be different from displaying the potential; it is also not the same as having it being identified by those in charge.

Similarly, attainment is not, and must not be the only indicator of future potential. In reality, however, a student runs a risk of not being seen as having potential to benefit from HE, if she or he underachieves or displays behaviour that is considered challenging, has a temporary 'dip' in attainment or is quiet and not on the teacher's 'radar'. This very broad description could mean that many bright promising young people who will flourish with appropriate support are excluded from certain opportunities, and blocked in their progress. This includes students with SEN, SpLD, EBD and those with comparatively low attainment.

Within WP, recommendations have been made for educational institutions to practice a broader approach to cohort identification (Universities UK, 2003; DfES, 2004; DCSF, 2008b). This approach promoted students' development as a journey, which echoed the concept of learning careers and learner identities that transform as a result of their interaction with the nurturing environment. Swain (2007, p.97) describes learner identity as something that is

“not viewed as an innate and unitary quality that people possess, but rather as something that people do or are done by... identities are unfinished and in process”.

The learner, therefore, is constantly adapting and growing as a result of “exposure to diverse forms of social interaction, new events and changing circumstances” (Bloomer and Hodgkinson, 2000, p. 594). This transitional, transformative view of one’s learner identity parallels the current discourse around resilience, discussed in Chapter 2. The learner identity approach also poses a question about the degree of validity of the process of identification one’s potential and thus inclusion into the cohort. In this regard, Hatt, Furness and Tate (2010) suggest exploring the young people’s potential to enter HE after the Aimhigher activity, rather than before. Indeed, this approach also promotes the ethos of creating opportunities for the disadvantaged and enhancing social mobility.

Not only the attempts to establish the young person’s potential may be biased, they can also further disadvantage those who are already disadvantaged. Although vulnerable groups had been given priority to access opportunities such as Aimhigher, the recognition of their status, driven by policy, may not be sufficient enough for them to take full advantage of this support, as they are often ‘lost’ in the student population (Leonard, 2011). Taking into account that one’s potential may be present but less evident at times, the changing nature of learner identity and the relative subjectivity of the final stage of the cohort selection, moving in and out of the cohort is not necessarily represented by the learner’s scope of abilities. It can be argued, therefore, that placing a young person within, or outside the Aimhigher cohort does not necessarily correspond with the agenda of social inclusion, equal opportunities, fair access and fair outcomes – despite extensive targeting guidelines (Leonard, 2011).

With regards to different cohort identification strategies, it is logical to assume, that these choices were affected not only by the institution's capacity to monitor the cohort composition, but also the resource availability in a busy environment (time constraints, staff allocation) as well as the staff's understanding. There are examples of subjective judgements of the pupils' eligibility, depriving vulnerable young people of opportunities. A study conducted by Aimhigher South West (Hatt, Furness and Tate, 2010) showed that a learner would not be considered for, or would be excluded from the cohort in the case of disruptive or anti-social behaviour or truancy. The school and college staff did not want to be seen as rewarding unacceptable behaviour: it was important to them to send the message, which was in line with the school policy. Thus, there is a duality of how Aimhigher initiative was perceived, where a principle of social justice (and thus a learner 'qualifying' for the support) would stumble upon the concept of an Aimhigher activity as 'a reward', available only to complying learners. The school's own agenda around promoting discipline got in the way of the young people accessing opportunities they were possibly eligible for.

This presented a potential challenge for many young people whose attainment was 'outside target' and those with SEN, EBD and SpLD. Indeed, potential comes in many forms; what can be 'misplaced' interests and ambitions are worthy of exploring and building upon. Similarly, keenness to participate can present as challenging behaviour in pupils with hidden and undiagnosed additional needs, where "what you see is not necessarily what you get" (Hatt, Furness and Tate, 2010, p.3).

There is evidence to suggest that information sharing protocols could provide a partial solution to this problem (Aimhigher West Midlands, 2011). Sharing data on learners' characteristics and progression could strengthen the objectivity behind cohort selection, improve monitoring of learners' progress and tailor the

relevance of activity provision. In practice, however, it proved very difficult to engage all parties in the data sharing process due to the understandable concerns around data protection and data management. It can also be assumed that managing this shared data over time would require substantial resource, which may not necessarily have been available.

Aimhigher work with young people looked after and in alternative education

As outlined in the previous section, there was a significant overlap between Aimhigher cohort and vulnerable groups, whose development and welfare is supported through the local authorities. Apart from the specific mention of children with learning difficulties and from care background (HEFCE, 2006), criteria such as coming from a background of multiple deprivation (as well as having potential to go to university) can be applied to many vulnerable young people.

Indeed, some of the core principles of Aimhigher were in alignment with other strands of Government policy, such as the ECM Agenda (DfES, 2004), which informed the work of the local authorities. Although it had not been made explicit from the start of the Aimhigher initiative, there is a shared ground between the WP agenda and policy around looked after children and care leavers. On the regional and local level, measures were taken to align policy strands (Aldridge and Dent, 2010; Hurrell, 2010). The notes of the Aimhigher Alignment group (Hurrell, 2010) demonstrate that a number of policy documents were used as guidance for the alignment strategy. These include the Leaving Care Act (2000), the work of the Social Exclusion Unit such as 'A better Education for Children in Care' (SEU, 2003), 'Going to University from Care' (Jackson, Ajayi and Quigley, 2005), 'Realising Young Potential: supporting care leavers into education, employment and training' (Great Britain, 2009) and 'Improving the

Educational Attainment of Children in care' (DCSF, 2009). Similarly, at the level of post-compulsory level, the messages are reinforced by such developments as the Frank Buttle HE Quality Mark, which put pressure on colleges and universities to support care leavers (Frank Buttle Trust, 2012).

However, despite a vast array of policy documents and the overlapping messages around attainment and aspirations of LACYP groups, the partnerships between Aimhigher and other agencies took some time to develop. This includes the joint work of Aimhigher and local authorities around supporting LACYP and care leavers. At the same time, there is evidence of long-standing practice, which demonstrates collaborations between local authorities and the Aimhigher's predecessor, the Excellence Challenge Initiative (Rouncefield-Swales, 2009).

A good example of joined up thinking around supporting LACYP is the launch of the national Aimhigher Alignment group. In order to make the most of the shared practice and match the existing provision onto key policies, several area partnerships came together, including Aimhigher South West, Peninsula, Merseyside, Kent and Medway, Herefordshire and Worcestershire. The evidence produced by the Alignment group (Hurrell, 2010) outlined the joint practice that focuses on attainment and aspirations of looked after children at school. The practice included setting up working groups that focus on the latter; close collaborative work between designated Aimhigher professionals (with LACYP remit), virtual heads and designated teachers; collaboration between Aimhigher and local authorities with a view to share data and devise best appropriate practices for children in care and care leavers; cross-sector training and mutual awareness with a view to design best suited interventions, such as mentoring, summer schools, homework clubs.

With regards to specific activities, there is evidence of Aimhigher providing tailored support to young people in and after care, such as summer schools, mentoring and other forms of tailored support (university visits, LACYP specific talks). The West Yorkshire Aimhigher Partnership in Kirklees, for example, delivered homework and book clubs, and catch-up sessions focussing on study skills (Kirklees Metropolitan Council, 2010). As a part of a cohesive approach to supporting LACYP, information-sharing mechanisms were enforced between designated teachers and Aimhigher professionals. This measure ensured that looked after children are included in all Aimhigher activities that are relevant to their progress. This provides a positive example of the use of information sharing protocols and the benefits it may have for the young people in question.

Despite these examples of positive partnership collaborations and good practice, the picture emerging from the available literature on Aimhigher work with the LACYP population points to the vast presence of policy- and practice-led literature. The latter mainly represent LA guidelines and reports, meeting records and newsletters. Although these are necessary elements of the successful operation of any programme, it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions with regards to the success of these practices and activities due to the lack of in-depth research into the matter. The same can be said about Aimhigher work with young people in AP; in fact, the evidence around this strand of activity is even more difficult to detect. It can be argued that there are objective reasons for this scarcity of evidence.

Firstly, young people in AP are not explicitly featured in the Aimhigher cohort guidance. At the same time, many children outside mainstream education come from disadvantage, deprivation; have a learning difficulty or are in care. Indeed, the diversity and complexity of their needs places these learners at risk of “very poor outcomes” (DCSF, 2008a, p. 11). It can be argued, therefore, that they are

under-represented in HE due to this multiple adversity and disadvantage. It can also be argued that these young people have all the potential to progress to HE (should they wish to), as the understanding of potential is subjective and lacks clarity. Again, the focus of the discussion is not so much on every young person entering HE (Grove, 2011; Alexiadu, 2012), but on understanding their potential as a part of the position vulnerable young people occupy in society. The argument is also about them having choice and equal access to the opportunities.

Unfortunately, children can miss out on opportunities such as Aimhigher, if their disposition or behaviour manifest in the way that is not associated with 'having potential' (Hatt, Furness and Tate, 2010). Many students with hidden disabilities and special needs do not receive the necessary support and may face exclusion (Elliott and Wilson, 2008). Learners excluded from school face the most disadvantage, when it comes to accessing developmental opportunities. At the same time, there is recognition that high quality AP may be more suitable to the young person's needs than a school with 'heavy duty' curriculum, crowded classrooms and pressures of tests and exams (Kendall et al., 2007; Gutherson, Davies and Daskiewicz, 2011). However, alternative education is also characterised by the feature of a limited curriculum which can lead to reducing their education-related, and potentially, other life outcomes (DCSF, 2008b; Taylor, 2011).

As a result of multiple deprivation, complexity of their needs and lack of support received within the care and the education system, children looked after and educated in alternative setting are exposed to fewer education and training opportunities (Reidy, 2012; Scottish Executive, 2007). Creegan (2008, p.1) claims that opportunity and aspiration are, in fact, "two sides of the same coin" in today's society. Blocked access to opportunity prevents individuals from realising

their aspirations. This statement points to the potential flaw of the policy language around Aimhigher. Indeed, the language of HEFCE guidance (HEFCE, 2012a), and most Aimhigher-generated literature speaks of “raising” learners’ motivation and aspiration. However, the discourse around truncated opportunities and young people as social agents (Matthews, 2001; Wyness, 1999; Creegan, 2008; Wills et al., 2008) suggests that the use of “releasing” or “fostering” aspirations is more appropriate.

Policy and language aside, accessing young people outside mainstream education system was somewhat difficult on the operational level. Most of learner-level targeting took place through ‘mainstream’ channels, which resulted in the vast majority of the cohort coming from mainstream schools. Furthermore, as this strategy was reinforced by the discourse around the potential to enter HE, the focus was placed on the achievement of the cohort participants, formally or informally. It is, perhaps, not surprising, that learners in AP were not at the forefront of WP outreach activity. That said, the numbers of students placed in the AP represent a very small percentage of the whole population in compulsory education. However, as lack of engagement with AP goes against the ‘Every Child Matters’ ethos, more effort should have been made to engage with learners in AP.

There have been, however, small pocket of good local practice involving Aimhigher partnerships working with learners from PRUs, special schools and other types of AP. For example, the invitation to participate in a two-year Robot Competition project, targeting young people in Year 9-10, and particularly girls, was extended to PRUs in Aimhigher Lincolnshire and Rutland (Slack and Vigurs 2006). Another example involves the Skills for Success programme in Northamptonshire, targeting parents and carers, as well as delivering training to professionals. It involved a series of training workshops delivered in PRUs with a

view to raise the profile academic attainment and provide staff with effective study skills – enhancing techniques (Aimhigher Northamptonshire, 2010).

Overall, the chances of these learners to access Aimhigher activities very much depended on the strength and breadth of collaborative partnerships in each particular area. Despite some examples of Aimhigher work aimed at AP, the evidence of such work is scarce. Moreover, it is difficult to evaluate the mechanisms of such provision and its effectiveness due to lack of information and sufficient research. It is still important, however, to acknowledge the positive meaning of such work and to encourage practitioners and researchers to build evidence around this field. One of the key messages for the Aimhigher's successor is the necessity to build in research mechanisms to capturing of the design, delivery and impact of the programme.

Issues around measuring impact

Brought out to address the longstanding (and, arguably increasing) inequality gap within today's society, Aimhigher was designed to reach out to groups, historically underrepresented in HE. In other words, the mission of Aimhigher was to improve the social mobility trends by widening participation in HE. To an extent, this was done by encouraging "more children from poor homes" (BBC, 2010) and other disadvantaged groups to apply to university. The key indicator of Aimhigher's effectiveness, therefore, would be increased numbers in applications to HE.

Policy context

Following the review conducted by Gorard et al. (2006), the effectiveness of the initiative had been continuously questioned. The HE entry data showed very little

progress with regards to the participation of entrants from lower socio-economic groups and from low participation neighbourhoods (HEFCE, 2006). In 2008, David Willetts spoke of the "rather disappointing record of Aimhigher", which had "not yet succeeded in spreading university opportunities on the scale that we might have hoped" (BBC, 2010). Following this trend, the Aimhigher funding was stopped in 2011. However, the debate around this decision and the role of Aimhigher continued, as the initiative was held in very positive regard among practitioners and young people (Hatt, Baxter and Tate, 2008; 2009; BBC, 2010; Attwood, 2010a; 2010b; Boffey, 2011).

Indeed, the complexity around understanding and measuring Aimhigher impact is one of the key features of the initiative (Chilosi et al., 2009; Waller, Hatt and Harrison, 2010; Harrison, 2012). This complexity comes from the discrepancy of the results and assumptions, featured in Aimhigher evaluations and the statistics on HE participation as a measure of social mobility change. One of the arguments in the midst of this debate was the use of the "wrong statistic" as a basis for measuring the effectiveness of Aimhigher interventions (Grove, 2012b). The wrong statistic strategy, in this case, involved using the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC) to identify the cohort which would be eligible for the interventions (Waller, Hatt and Harrison, 2010). Moreover, as Harrison (2012) claims, using the classification to detect widened participation in HE is not sufficient, as many of those who benefited from Aimhigher interventions would not feature, such as children from families receiving benefits. Additionally, as this information was collected through the learners' self-reporting of their family occupation and income, a large percentage of the data was incomplete and subjective. It can also be argued that capping university numbers towards the end of Aimhigher (Elliott, 2010) meant that many students were turned away.

Similar patterns could be observed in Aimhigher targeting. As discussed earlier in this chapter, several adjustments were made to approaching the Aimhigher

cohort, by introducing different indicators, which had an overlap. On one hand, it can be argued, that this flexible, reactive nature of Aimhigher contributed to some policy alignment and the inclusion of LACYP groups and learners with disabilities. On the other hand, these changes had a knock-one effect for Aimhigher partnerships, which were under pressure to react and adjust accordingly:

“What was not made clear... was which [indicator] should be dominant in targeting activities and monitoring progress. Most partnerships convened data management groups to try to make sense of the plethora of information coming back from coalface practitioners, with a national network established to share practice more widely”.

(Harrison, 2012, p. 33)

The distinction between indicators and their priority had not been made clear until half way through the Aimhigher term (HEFCE, 2007).

Of course, it is important to acknowledge, that Aimhigher operated in the background of wider economic, social and political contexts. Aimhigher was not the only initiative to support disadvantaged young people in terms of educational progression and overall development. For example, the initiative titled (somewhat confusingly) Aiming High focused on supporting disabled young people (DCSF, 2007). Similarly, a project titled *Achieveability* (May, 2006; Achieveability, 2013) was set up in collaboration with Aimhigher to support academic progression of learners with dyslexia. Similarly, the Sure Start initiative had some resemblance to the work carried out by Aimhigher in primary schools (Prowse, 2008).

At the same time, all the existing provision was running in the background of the global and national economy shift, as well as dramatic changes in the public sector. This includes the increasing scarcity of financial and human resources and

the decreasing provision for the vulnerable groups; the downward employment trends; capping of HE application numbers in 2010 (Shepherd, 2010) and the university fees hike (Elliott, 2012). It can be argued, therefore, that attributing young people's educational aspirations to their experience of Aimhigher participation alone in the background of objectively present socio-economic processes is short-sighted.

Area partnership context

Aimhigher area partnerships had to operate in a complex landscape. Changing messages from 'the top' around the cohort criteria meant that collecting data and reporting on progress had to be continuously revised. The process was further complicated by the fact that Aimhigher, due to its brokering nature, had to rely on other partners for data monitoring and evaluation. Doubts around cohort identification, inclusion of vulnerable young people and establishing one's potential have also been discussed.

Despite these difficulties, however, Aimhigher partnerships painted an overwhelmingly positive picture of students and teachers engaging with initiative. Aimhigher evaluations refer to making a positive impact in raised confidence (academic-related and more general) and improved self-esteem in learners who participated in the Aimhigher activities (Hatt, Baxter and Tate, 2008; 2009; Carpenter, Church and Kerrigan, 2010). Participants also reported improved motivation and planning for the future; improved attendance and attainment (Carpenter, Church and Kerrigan, 2010). Policy reports and regional publications claimed a positive difference that summer schools and mentoring activities played in shaping young people's aspirations about their future (Hatt and Austin, 2005; Pennel, West and Hind 2005; HEFCE 2006; Hatt, Baxter and Tate, 2009).

However, the validity of these statements has been contested. In particular, Gorard et al. (2006) argue that the claims of causality of Aimhigher interventions are difficult to quantify and are generally unfounded, as they are not underpinned by scientific methods of data collection and data analysis. The authors also claim that the quality of Aimhigher-produced literature is below par, as it was mainly produced by practitioners, rather than academics. Other concerns involve the descriptive nature of Aimhigher literature; feedback based on short-term perceptions of learners; and possible social desirability bias. Moreover, as practitioners are constrained by the pressures of the funders, their reports may lack objectivity.

Indeed, even the authors who were less opposed to, or even pro-Aimhigher, do not dispute the circumstances in which Aimhigher reports were produced (Chilosi et al., 2009; Harrison, 2012). Aimhigher partnerships and practitioners had to design, deliver, monitor and evaluate activities under pressure and, possibly, without being given the necessary tools to produce more viable evidence. In fact, some authors argue that Aimhigher's task was made near impossible due to the lack of clarity around indicators of measuring success (Waller, Hatt and Harrison, 2010). In essence, it seems that due a number of realistic constraints there cannot be a consensus on the role and impact of Aimhigher. However, lessons can, and should be learnt - in particular, in the view of the forthcoming Aimhigher-like initiative, as well as broader policy scope (Grove, 2013).

Chilosi et al. (2009) draw attention to the importance of the collaboration with academics in the application of scientific method (experimental research design) to data collection and analysis. It is also suggested that the most effective approach should combine qualitative and quantitative data and a longitudinal element. However, constraints such as short-term funding and having to rely on

other partners to provide data complicate the issue. Moreover, it has been acknowledged that it may be difficult to access learners once they are outside compulsory education, particularly considering that many may be taking non-traditional pathways to HE. At the same time, despite the constraints, the brokering role of Aimhigher creates unique opportunity for researching cross-partnership interventions. Additionally, using qualitative approach alongside data sets brings the individual aspect to policy-related research, thus advocating social agency.

Experiences and perceptions of the young people

In the midst of the discussion it is important to remember the young people who took part in Aimhigher interventions. Beyond the critique referring to short-term impact of Aimhigher and descriptive data (Gorard et al., 2006), thousands of young people had a certain experience in their life and shared their perceptions and attitudes after taking part. There was also a relatively small number of young people from vulnerable groups, including children with disabilities, LACYP and learners in AP. It is, indeed, unfortunate that their stories were not fully captured.

However, certain changes were captured. Young people's accounts featured in the studies of Maras et al. (2007), Hatt, Baxter and Tate (2008; 2009), Chilosi et al. (2008) and Kerrigan and Church (2011) point to transformations in the young people's attitude, and behaviour patterns; there are also records of increased motivation, confidence and self-esteem. It can be argued that a broader understanding of Aimhigher's role in the young person's life offers useful insights. It seems that these important findings, however remote from the statistic of going to university, have been lost in the debate around Aimhigher impact. Literature on management of change stresses equal importance of both

planned and unanticipated project results. Using open-minded research techniques provides the flexibility necessary to capture unintended programme outcomes. The 'evaluation as illumination' approach, used for in-depth explorations of education-based innovations (Parlett and Hamilton, 1987; Fullan, 1991; Webb and Vulliamy, 2004), could offer fuller understanding of Aimhigher impact.

In this regard, it is useful to return to the concept of identity formation and its connection with attitudes, aspirations and behaviour. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the formation of (learner) identity (Bloomer and Hodgkinson, 2000) is grounded in the individual's interactions with events, people and circumstances. Identity is not static, it is dynamic and "in process" (Swain, 2007, p.97). The link between positive identity formation and inner characteristics such as aspiration, motivation, self-confidence and self-esteem has been acknowledged in Aimhigher-related literature (Hatt, Baxter and Tate, 2009; Maras, Gudaityte and Potterton, 2009). Literature points to the connection between these factors and resilience building as a result of participation in extra-curricular activities (Gilligan, 2000; Newman, 2004; NCH, 2007). At the same time, descriptions of Aimhigher activities suggest that the interventions were designed as an amalgamation of mechanisms rooted in education, psychology, youth and social work as a result of flexible and diverse collaborations.

Interestingly, there is an overlap between the notion of dynamic identity formation, resilience and the 'life cycle approach' underpinning the Government's strategy on social mobility (Cabinet Office, 2011). Social mobility is currently described in policy as "a measure of how free people are to improve their position in society" (Cabinet Office, 2011, p. 15). Improving one's position in society means improving their access to resources (including high quality education and health service, stable sufficient income, connections that foster

social and cultural capital). Having equal access also involves removing barriers that prevent individuals from being able to take advantage of these opportunities. It can be argued, therefore, that the work of Aimhigher around “breaking down the barriers” and “dispelling the myths” around participation in HE are just one side of the coin. The other side of the coin represents the rest of the environment around the young person, which includes their family and wider community, as well as the education, health and social support system. Therefore, although social mobility is associated with a certain level of education, it does not come down to HE alone. In fact, it has been argued that recent expansion of HE has had a negative effect on the social mobility trends, whereby the most disadvantaged have been pushed further down on the social mobility ladder (Sparrow, 2012). This observation echoes the discussion around inclusion (or lack thereof) of vulnerable young people in the Aimhigher cohort. It seems, despite the good intentions behind certain policies and strategies, those most in need continue to be further disadvantaged in the society.

Having equal access to or being prevented from accessing support and opportunities is an issue of social justice. Although this issue is much broader than educational inequality, education can play a crucial role in this process. Jones and Thomas (2005) present three approaches to education, where focusing on academic progression is just one of the few roles of the latter. It does not imply institutional change, thus ignoring structural barriers; it has been criticised for its resemblance of the deficit model. The utilitarian approach, however, has compensatory features and aims to address the learner’s insufficient preparation for the next step on the progression ladder.

The third, transformative concept provides a more holistic view, which allows policy and practice to focus on broader interests and needs of the targeted groups. It does not only allow, but requires institutional change as a positive,

continuous process. This way of thinking, favoured by some democratic educators (Sheeran et al., 2010), 'connects' with the school of sociological thought in order to foster social change. Burke (2012, p.9) calls for "revisioning" of WP and broader understanding of power and privilege, and their complex origins rooted in not just educational, but social, economic and cultural inequality. Focusing on quick-fix measures to boost up diversity in HE is not sufficient, if not simply unrealistic. These considerations should also be underpinning the evaluation mechanisms for future intervention frameworks.

Conclusion

This chapter discusses the controversies and contradictions that surrounded the Aimhigher initiative. Introduced to improve the social mobility trends in the UK, Aimhigher operated across forty-two partnerships (HEFCE, 2012b) with a view to widen participation in HE by inspiring underrepresented groups to go to university. Following inconclusive evidence of its impact, the scheme was scrapped in 2011. Aimhigher was criticised for a "disappointing" result of failing to achieve its remit (BBC, 2010). This decision was contradicted by strong messages from Aimhigher partners, teachers and pupils advocating the positive role of the initiative.

The reasons behind this contradiction are several. On one hand, there was a lack of cohesion between the aims, and therefore, the indicators underpinning the operation. In other words, raising aspirations, awareness and attainment of a certain group does not have to necessarily translate into HE participation. Similarly, it may not necessarily improve social mobility on the national scale, in particular, in view of other social, economic and political shifts. Therefore, the expectations that were placed on Aimhigher may have been overambitious.

On the other hand, evidence suggests that the mechanisms behind targeting strategies were inconsistent and lacked clarity; their execution was not grounded in realistic considerations. Although refining the cohort criteria was necessary for monitoring and evaluation, the ever-changing directives caused confusion and disruption of multi-agency collaborations. In addition, challenges around data sharing and cohort monitoring contributed to the difficulties around reporting on the cohort composition, impact of participation and pupil progression.

At the same time, there were interesting examples of partnership and multi-agency collaborations resulting from the brokering role of Aimhigher and crossing agendas, with education being at the centre. Innovative tailored provision, emerging out of the local needs and strengthened by the insights of several parties, has been commended and is worth further exploration (Passy, 2011; McCaig and Bowers-Brown, 2007). However, most of it was potentially lost as its potential impact was never fully explored in the background of arguably narrow HE agenda. It has since been advocated that to address this flaw, more attention needs to be given to the “bottom-up” approach in the future (Atherton, 2013).

It transpires from the examples of this localised unique provision, that at least some of it was targeted at vulnerable groups, such as looked after children and children outside of mainstream education. There is also evidence of attempts to align policy strands in order to improve targeting of these groups, for example, the alignment activity around young people in public care and their educational outcomes. At the same time there is still considerable lack of cohesion in approaching pupils who are at most disadvantage. The confusion around Aimhigher cohort identification resulted in missing, or even further disadvantaging those who were most in need of this support and were entitled to it (Hatt, Furness and Tate, 2010). The notion of ‘having potential’ as a criterion

for qualifying for Aimhigher experience (HEFCE, 2012a) was often left to the mercy of the professionals in charge, and therefore, could be interpreted equally for the benefit, or against the child.

However, in spite of multiple discrepancies, short-sightedness and lack of joined-up thinking, evidence presented by the Aimhigher partnerships points to thousands of young people who had a positive experience taking part in Aimhigher activity. Despite the critique towards the non-scientific nature of this evidence, produced by practitioners, these reports feature accounts of raised awareness, aspirations and attainment, as well as higher levels of confidence and self esteem. These are important insights into the young people's experiences and outcomes, which present valuable starting points for both research and practice. Positioned in the broader understanding of child development, these findings can illuminate the mechanisms behind building successful provision for young people. It is paramount not to omit unintended project outcomes alongside the search for those planned from the outset (Parlett and Hamilton, 1987; Fullan, 1991).

The need to redefine the outcomes of Aimhigher experience in terms of broader impact also presents a different view of education and its role in building social mobility in today's society. Entering HE may not necessarily improve the social mobility of the groups and individuals placed at disadvantage, in particularly in the background of rising university fees, high unemployment and scarce opportunities. There is a need for more holistic approach to education and to learning as the individual's interaction with a wider environment. Additionally, the existing and future provision should focus on removing barriers to accessing support and opportunities, as well as the identification and building of the young people's strengths. Policy and practice should be underpinned by the stronger emphasis on both the individual and the (multiple) environmental factors.

4 Methodology

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the methods and tools that were applied to the inquiry. The study has emerged out of the insufficient understanding of Aimhigher impact, in particular, on the learner level. Additionally, the study is driven by the increasing interest in resilience as an operational framework, which could inform current and future interventions for vulnerable young people (Rutter, 2005; Schofield and Beek, 2005).

As outlined in Chapter 3, Aimhigher was set up as a WP initiative with a focus on HE progression of the under-represented groups. While evidence of Aimhigher improving social mobility was inconclusive, there were other strands of data received much less attention – for example, Aimhigher participants' accounts, which point to a potential change across several individual resilience domains, such as aspirations, motivation and confidence (Hatt, Baxter and Tate, 2008; 2009; Carpenter, Church and Kerrigan, 2010). Although these changes were mainly considered in terms of their contribution to the young people's academic aspiration, they are also associated with a wider impact, which may not have been intended but was equally important (Parlett and Hamilton, 1987; Fullan, 1991; Webb and Vulliamy, 2004). Positioned within the framework of resilience and adolescent development, these changes could present useful insights for research and practice.

The aim of the study is to grasp the meanings attached by the young people to their interactions with their environments. As detailed in Chapter 2, the dynamic nature of resilience implies that this interaction happens over time. This process includes a multitude of factors, events and processes, which affect participants' lives in complex, sometimes unpredictable ways (Blumer, 1969, cited in Adams and Sydie, 2001; Rutter, 1989; Yates, Egeland and Sroufe, 2003). The framework of resilience and the variety and interplay of its domains serve as a fitting 'kaleidoscope of prisms' to accommodate the complexity, variety and individuality of these interactions, and thus retain their 'true' (Ungar, 2003) meaning. The latter is considered 'true' as it provides an authentic reflection of the subject's experience.

The assumed change in the centre of the exploration would be happening within this complex and dynamic context of numerous events, experiences and impacts. The assumption of change suggests some difference between the 'before' and 'after', which manifests in a number of ways. Exploring the nature of the change, however, implies looking closely into the process between the 'before' and 'after' and the interplay of various factors, as perceived by the young person. The study features a retrospective aspect with a view to capture events taking place over time. This approach is useful in terms of resilience research; it also responds to the criticisms of Aimhigher with regards to the lack of long-term impact explorations (Gorard et al., 2006; Chilosi et al., 2009).

The study also contributes to the wider body of literature on experiences of vulnerable young people, namely those placed in care or outside mainstream education. The voice of those in most need of support and services has often been omitted from the research due to the difficult nature of gaining access and conducting research (Curtis et al. 2004; Hill, 1997). The qualitative approach chosen for this exploration highlights their experiences and opinions of what

works for these young people. This study therefore aims to add to the understanding of the way LACYP groups and learners in AP are supported by services.

This chapter looks at the theoretical and practical considerations for the chosen methodology, as well specific aspects of researching vulnerable young people and insider research. Details of sampling strategy, collecting information and data analysis are outlined. Chapter 5 provides detailed information on the participants' characteristics.

Aims and objectives of the study

The study focuses on life experiences of nineteen young people from the background of public care and alternative education. The key aim of the study is to explore the potential role of Aimhigher as a contributing factor in their development, which is framed in terms of developing resilient patterns. For the purposes of this study, the experiences of the young people are explored in terms of risk and protective factors and processes across resilience domains. Within this study, impact is also understood as change, in broad terms, in attitudes, behaviour, transitions and outcomes.

The research aims to explore the participants' interactions with events and people, and their perceived meaning and importance. The exploration incorporates events and experiences in young people's lives 'before' and 'after' their participation in Aimhigher activity. Within that, the impact of Aimhigher is also explored. The key aim is to establish the 'true', or unique (Ungar, 2003) meaning of Aimhigher experience for the young people and the role it played in their lives.

The study focuses on three main areas of investigation. Firstly, the young people's accounts had to be analysed in terms of the presence of change over time, as well as its nature and meaning. Secondly, the impact of Aimhigher activity had to be explored, in particular, any effects and outcomes that could illuminate the broader understanding of Aimhigher impact (Parlett and Hamilton, 1987; Fullan, 1991; Webb and Vulliamy, 2004). And, finally, both elements were brought together and explored in terms of developing and exhibiting resilient patterns. By conducting these three steps, the study positioned the Aimhigher experience within the young people's life trajectories over time, and its role within the resilience framework.

Theoretical considerations

The research design and the implementation of the research methodology for this study have been predisposed by the adopted theoretical viewpoint, and the associated epistemological and ontological approaches. There were also practical considerations that made this research possible.

The aims and the nature of the study as well as the characteristics of the participants position the research in the interpretivist tradition, and in particular, symbolic interactionism. The meaning and importance of individual accounts (perceptions, attitudes and 'interactional selves' (Denzin, 1992, p.26) transpiring through interaction with others and recognition of their views provide a relevant background to this study, which explores experiences of vulnerable young people and their development as a part of a series of interactions with their environment (Bryman, 2008; Cohen, 1989; Denzin, 1992; Rhea, 1981). As this study sets out to explore processes and their meanings within the resilience framework, the values of symbolic interactionism provide a fitting backdrop for this exploration. Understood best as a dynamic process, resilience can be viewed

as continuous interaction between the young person and the environment, as well as the interplay of stressful and protective elements within it.

Traditionally, resilience and its components had been measured with the help of quantitative methods and tools, in particular, in the field of psychology and medicine. Overall, quantitative methods of research have been recognised as those with comparatively higher validity and reliability, as opposed to findings generated through small-scale qualitative research. However, Masten (2011) points out that the complexity and unpredictability surrounding resilience reduces the validity and reliability of quantitative studies. Methodological reviews conducted with a view to establish the most reliable quantitative research tools have not been able to identify a reliable instrument that would deliver valid results across most categories (Ahern et al., 2006; Windle et al., 2011). Despite a wide range of resilience-measuring scales currently available, no instrument has been selected as “gold standard” (Windle et al., 2011, p.1) when it comes to measuring resilience. Large-scale surveys, no matter how detailed, do not seem to account sufficiently for “other factors not measured” (Ahern et al., 2006, p.115). In some cases, it was possible to capture the change between the start and end points of the measured interval, “but not the process” (Ahern et al., 2006, p.115).

Most recently there has been a growing interest in qualitative methods of inquiry in the field of resilience. According to Ungar (2003, p.92), qualitative methods present the “solution to the muddle” by addressing the lack of consensus in research on what constitutes risk and protection. Qualitative method, flexible and in-depth, provides ‘space’ for the exploration of specific contexts, capturing the individual voices, which “account for unique localised definitions of positive outcomes” (Ungar, 2003, p.86). The nature of qualitative research accommodates the variety of ways in which the not-yet-discovered phenomena

can manifest themselves. Ungar (2003) also draws attention to the transferability of findings in qualitative research, as opposed to generalisability within the quantitative approach. Within qualitative research, interviews allow the researcher to explore the meaning of events as interpreted by the subject. Interviews provide scope for the focus on localised contexts, individual voices and unique experiences. These insights help address the issue of the unknown and unintended outcomes (Parlett and Hamilton, 1987; Fullan, 1991; Webb and Vulliamy, 2004), such as Aimhigher impact as well as the subjectivity of risk and protection (Thoit, 1995).

Interviews have been used in resilience-focused studies, which attempted to broaden the understanding of life experiences of groups described within research and policy as 'at risk' and 'vulnerable' (see Tupuola, Cattell and Stansfeld (2008) for the definitions of these concepts). For example, Ungar et al. (2005) conducted an exploration into resilience and the impact of the outdoor activities on the at-risk youths.

At the same time, using mixed methods enhances results by "achieving a finer grain" (Ungar, 2003, p.91) in understanding and presentation of the findings. Bachay and Cingel (1999) conducted a retrospective study of experiences of minority women in America, whose voices were captured in questionnaires, followed by focus groups. In another study, Marsiglia et al. (2002) explored family and school relationships as protective factors for the Latino adolescents in urban environments. A mixed research design was applied, that used interviews and a measurement scale. This study utilises semi-structured interviews featuring a longitudinal (retrospective) element. The interviews were complemented by a resilience scale.

Practical considerations

The pre-existing collaborative relationship between Aimhigher and gate keeping organisations enabled the researcher to gain access to the groups in question. As LACYP groups and young people in AP are frequently described as ‘hard-to-reach’ (Curtis, 2004, Brackertz, 2007; Wilkinson, 2009), this was a helpful feature of the investigation. However, as discussed later in this chapter, despite this pre-existing relationship with these organisations, gaining access took much longer than expected. This was partly due to the structural changes within partner organisations and staff leaving (caused by public cuts), and the inconsistency of contact data.

On a different note, the pre-existing partnership arrangement meant that the person working on the study was, in fact, a practitioner who took on the role of the researcher. This consideration called for more thorough ethical reflections and protocols in order to maintain the credibility and objectivity of the investigation (Bryman, 2008).

Researcher-practitioner duality

During the stages of gaining access and data collection the researcher worked for the Aimhigher initiative. The study, therefore, had features of insider research. Insider, or endogenous (Maruyama, 1981) research is a growing phenomenon due to a number of factors, including the increasing demand for evidence-based practice in conditions of higher accountability and limited resources (Darlington and Scott, 2002). However, the researcher’s ‘insiderness’ can be fluid and multi-layered, making them both an insider and outsider (Trowler, 2011). This observation is useful, as the researcher was an insider to Aimhigher, however, she was the outsider to the gate keeping organisations. Therefore, the connection between the young people and the researcher was indirect.

Literature identifies both 'pros' and the 'cons' of endogenous research (Darlington and Scott, 2002; Grinyer, 2005; Trowler, 2011). On one hand, it eases access to the gate keepers and the hard-to-reach groups; it can also provide a deeper understanding of the context (in this case, Aimhigher initiative, particularly considering the scarcity and inconsistency of information available). Additionally, the experience of working with disadvantaged young people may lead to a better awareness of the important issues around these groups.

At the same time however, being a part of the organisation may affect the research objectivity and validity (although the significance of bias is dependent on epistemological standpoint, Grinyer, 2005). Other issues include conflict of interest, intrusiveness and concerns over confidentiality. To minimise these effects, it was vital for the researcher to develop robust ethical procedures that would take into account actual and potential sensitive aspects of the study (Israel, 2006). It was also crucial for the researcher to exercise her reflexive awareness from the start of the process, throughout field work and beyond (Hodkinson, 2005; Brannick and Coghlan, 2007). The period, during which the researcher was not employed by the initiative, therefore, helps balance potential issues around power, objectivity and the participant's voice.

For this study, an emotional aspect featured strongly as a part of the insider research; the latter has not been widely discussed in literature (Melrose, 2005). The pressure (and the privilege) of working with vulnerable groups and the related sensitivity, heightened by the pre-existing knowledge (and as a practitioner – firsthand experience) of their circumstances, vulnerability and adversities – makes "getting in, getting on and getting out" near impossible (Darlington and Scott, 2002, p.31).

Firstly, having prior knowledge of the challenges the young people faced or may have faced (as a practitioner, through personal experience and anecdotal evidence from colleagues and professionals from other agencies; and from related research and professional documents). This sense of empathy is emotionally difficult, although it can also drive researchers and practitioners on their journey. Additionally, it was challenging to separate oneself from having the sense of continued responsibility to help the young person (primarily by providing IAG) if they asked for such help. In such cases, notes were taken with regards to such queries and addressed after the interview in order not to interrupt the flow of the conversation. And, lastly, there was certain sensitivity around working with the Aimhigher team members, who were responsible for the activities for LACYP and young people in AP.

The study also had elements of action research (see, for example, Atew, Kemmis and Weeks, 1998; McNiff and Whitehead, 2000). Within action research, the findings of the study can be applied to improve the existing and future practice, especially considering the growing attention surrounding the resilience framework as an operational construct (Schofield and Beek, 2005). The findings of this research can illuminate the design and delivery of current and future interventions in education, social work and youth work, as well as the forthcoming “slimmer Aimhigher 2” (Grove, 2013).

Child-centred approach

The literature on groups described as vulnerable, hard to reach and marginalised points to the fact that their voices are not heard often enough. In policy, practice, and research “we are guilty of ignoring, disregarding and trivialising” their stories (Fitzgerald, Jobling and Kirk, 2003, p.176). The danger of building an uneven relationship between professionals and service users is very real.

According to Petrie, Fiorelli and O'Donnell (2006), the 'power' of young people in a society driven by the adult-constructed meanings is often merely tokenistic.

Therefore, it was paramount for this study to capture the experiences of the young people as perceived and described by them. A way to capture individual narratives in their 'true' form is through utilising methods of inquiry and data analysis that are sufficiently flexible and holistic. Semi-structured interviews provided scope for the young people to construct their stories and elaborate on meanings; presenting the data as narratives and life trajectories helped preserve most of the original expressions. Using participants' quotes throughout brought the data 'to life' and preserved the authenticity of expression. This was complemented by structure of resilience domains and the time frame (the 'before' and the 'after' Aimhigher experience).

Traditional methods and techniques have been criticised for conducting research 'on', rather than 'with' children (Barker and Weller, 2003). Recently research literature saw a growing trend in applications of innovative, expressive qualitative methods, which provide broader scope for capturing complex experiences and meanings. Apart from the interview data, this study also contains 'satellite' context featuring of poetry, and reflective diaries (produced by other young people during various Aimhigher activities). Used alongside the interview data, this material presents a powerful account of the effect certain life events, both happy and sad, have on young people. Overall, the accounts of the participants portray them as social actors, who are – even when they are not in charge of their lives – are very aware of what's going on around them (see, for example, Matthews, 2001; Wyness, 1999; Creegan, 2008; Wills et al., 2008). The information that populated the 'satellite' setting is presented in greater detail in the *Data analysis* section of Chapter 4 and Appendix 3.

The child-centred approach also allowed the researcher to elicit the individual meanings of what risk and protective factors may constitute to a particular young person. For example, whereas movement is recognised as a risk or a stress factor in a child's life, as it brings instability, interruptions and lack of consistency, for some young people moving school or moving foster placements meant leaving behind the "wrong crowd" or a negative foster carer experience. Focusing on the participant's voice, the researcher was able to elicit individual meanings that helped explain the way the young people's lives are affected. Throughout the research, the focus remained on capturing varying perspectives and their meanings within specific contexts. The child-centred approach also promotes the emphasis on the young people's potential and resilience-building capacity in the background of multiple adversity.

Research tools

As the study focuses on the life experiences of vulnerable young people and the unique meanings these experiences carry, it seemed most appropriate to apply qualitative methods to the inquiry (Layder, 1993). In-depth interviews were carried out with nineteen young people and nine professionals. Semi-structured interviews appeared to be most suitable in terms of the adopted theoretical framework (Neuman, 2000).

The interview schedule (Appendix 2) was devised to assist a guided discussion. The interview schedule was comprised of a resilience scale and open-ended questions. The inclusion of a resilience scale brought in a quantitative element into the qualitative study, which catered to a variety of respondent styles and added a "finer grain" to data analysis (Ungar 2003, p.91). The schedule was structured around three 'themes', which represented their life experiences 'before' Aimhigher; experience of Aimhigher activity, including the nature and any potential impact of Aimhigher; and, lastly, young people's life experiences

after Aimhigher. However, each interview was different; sufficient flexibility and freedom was ensured in order for the participants to tell their own stories. In certain instances not all questions got answered, or the direction of the interview changed slightly. Each case was approached on an individual basis; often the decision was made to follow the interviewee's narrative in order to obtain richer, potentially more meaningful and subjective data (Ungar, 2003). It was not always possible to follow the same structure of the interview with the professionals, as they may have only been familiar with certain aspects of a young person's life. Therefore, these interviews had a less structured approach, although informed by the interview schedule.

The key themes for the interview structure were adapted from Hanson's and Kim's (2007) "Measuring resilience and youth development: the psychometric properties of the healthy kids survey". The main reason for the choice of this particular tool was the education-related nature of Aimhigher and its activities. The survey tools (scale domains) from the Healthy Kids Survey have been adapted by other studies that explored experiences of vulnerable groups. For example, a US-based study of the school experiences of LGBT youth and the impact on their health and wellbeing (Russell et al., 2010; Toomey et al., 2011).

A number of other sources have also been consulted (Benard, 1991; 2004; Constantine et al., 1999; Hawkins, Catalano and Miller, 1992; Masten, 2001; Masten and Coatsworth, 1998; Resnick et al., 2000; Rutter, 1987; Werner and Smith, 1982; 1992). As outlined earlier in this chapter, despite the vast presence of versatile resilience scales in the research literature, neither was found to offer a 'perfect solution' when it comes to measuring the complex construct that is resilience; however, qualitative and quantitative tools can be used in a complementary fashion (Ungar, 2003). Therefore, the scale was secondary to the key qualitative data, gained from the in-depth interviews.

As changes were explored over time, the longitudinal (in this case, retrospective) aspect was of particular importance. For example, Peterson, Duncan and Canady (2009) conducted an eleven-year study of the impact of negative factors on gifted and talented young people. Of course, retrospective accounts can produce bias, as they are, in fact, memories (Winkel et al., 2003). However, for half of the sample, these memories were just two-three months old. For others, it was a matter of one to four years. Therefore, a certain variety was achieved in terms of length of time that the participants were reflecting on. Additionally, a pure longitudinal experiment was not possible at that point due to the closure of Aimhigher.

Ethical considerations

As this study involved collecting data from young people considered vulnerable, a number of ethical considerations had to be taken into account in designing the research tools, collecting and analysing data. In accordance with the BSA Ethical guidelines (BSA, 2002) and the University of Bedfordshire IASR guidelines (University of Bedfordshire, 2010), consent was sought from all the young people (notwithstanding of age) and the consent of the guardian (parent or carer) was obtained for all young people who were under sixteen years old (the youngest participant being fourteen). All young people in the sample were able to provide independent accounts (Gillick and Fraser competency guidelines were used for this; see, for example, NSPCC, 2012). The approval of the LA was also granted for conducting this study. The ESRC guidelines (ESRC, 2010) were also consulted.

Measures were taken to ensure that the language in the research brief and the interview schedule were phrased appropriately for the target group. The pilot stage was also used to judge the level of language and make any necessary alterations. All young people were approached via a letter outlining the study

and inviting them to participate. The letters were sent to the young people by the professionals in the gatekeeping organisations.

There is emerging sensitivity in research with regards to the balance of power between researcher and the interviewee, particularly in the case of vulnerable groups (see Piercy and Hargate, 2004). Qualitative research seeks to acknowledge differences and potential tensions in the balance of power, but it also has the potential to empower participants through recognising their agency in the process (Wolcott, 1994). In this study, apart from obtaining informed consent notwithstanding of age, the researcher made sure that the interviewees could choose time, place and venue for the interview. For the participants' convenience, stamped self-addressed envelopes were enclosed in their letter. After the follow up phone call, those who did not want to participate were not contacted again.

All interviews were conducted in a public place, apart from two interviews, that took place in young people's home as per their request. In both cases, a parent or a carer were present, also at the request of the young person. There was also an interview that took place at a school, but in a separate, secluded area. The young person also asked for a trusted member of staff to be present at the interview. As he seemed rather upset, he was asked several times throughout the interview by the researcher (and the teaching staff), whether he would prefer to cancel or postpone the interview; he wanted to continue. This example highlights further the importance of the child-centred approach to research. In this instance, it turned out that the young people felt more comfortable with an adult being present. Harden et al. (2010) support this observation, whereby having trusted adults at an interview can empower a child more than interviewing the child on a one-to-one basis.

Young people were briefed about the confidentiality and anonymity principles (in the letter as well as at the start of the interview) and were made aware of the exceptions in the confidentiality clause. All the details that could identify young people were changed. All the information was stored securely under password; once the names were changed the originals were destroyed.

Gaining access to the target groups

Gaining access is often a complex and often problematic part of conducting field work, especially if the study involves vulnerable or hard-to-reach groups (Curtis, 2004; Brackertz, 2007; Wilkinson, 2009).

The access was potentially made easier by the pre-existing relationship between Aimhigher and partner organisation. In addition, obtaining contact details of those who agreed to participate was aided by the fact that the young people were still in the care or the education system. On the other hand, the lives of LACYP groups and pupils outside mainstream education is characterised by movement and instability; this made getting hold of them and actually making the interview happen a complex and unpredictable process. Similarly, the details for most care leavers were also out of date; as a result, it proved most effective to get hold of the most recent participants. Postal addresses for the young people who left the system were often missing or incorrect. The process of sending out letters and gaining access to the young people was also affected by the structural changes in the local authority, which followed the public cuts reform. These changes may have affected gaining access to, and ultimately, the characteristics of the sample.

Gaining access and making contact was also affected by the researcher-practitioner duality. In one instance, the researcher was making a follow-up phone call to a young person who agreed to participate in the study; the young person was stranded in a different town with no means to contact social

services. As a result, the researcher-practitioner spent several hours arranging transportation for this young person to get home. The issue had finally been resolved; however, it was not possible to get hold of the young person again. Similarly, on other occasions, young people would not turn up and reschedule several times. 'No-shows' were followed up, again, not only for research purposes but also to make sure the young person is "all right".

The sample

Eighty four young people took part in the LACYP-specific activities and 52 young people took part in AP – specific activities organised by the Aimhigher partnership in question between 2007 and 2011 (136 in total). It is useful to mention here that their participation was not totally 'random', but followed a principle underpinned by the notion of 'potential' and professional judgement, as described in Chapter 3. In other words, the young people who found themselves on an Aimhigher residential (or another activity) were invited, or selected on the basis of a range of criteria (as judged by the gate keeping professional), which mainly focused around (perceived) potential to progress onto higher education.

Once the ethical clearance for the project was received, meetings have been arranged with the gate keeping organisations. Four gatekeeping authorities have been contacted: one LA and three AP centres. All of the participants in question (136) came into contact with Aimhigher via one of these authorities. The process of gaining access involved the designated contact in gate keeping organisation locating the names and contact details of the young people and sending out the letters (and all relevant documentation, such as information sheet and consent form) to the participants. A similar process was followed in relation to foster carers and parents, as well as professionals who were working with the young

people in question. The researcher was informed that all of the 136 young people were contacted, as well as parents and/or carers for these young people. It was not clear how many professionals were contacted within organisations, as the invitations were distributed both orally (at meetings) and via all-staff internal email.

Overall, 19 young people and 9 professionals took part in the study (their characteristics are discussed in detail in Chapter 5).

Data collection

Gaining access and data collection can be very time consuming (Dunleavy, 2003). With this in mind, a reasonable amount of time had to be allocated for the data collection. Despite the pre-existing relationships with the gatekeepers, gaining access and obtaining up-to-date contact details was not always without difficulties. The following section outlines the steps that were undertaken during the period of approximately 30 months.

Phase I. July 2008-August 2009

Professionals within gate keeping organisations were approached to get their initial views on the study. It was also necessary to secure the professional relationship that will enable the researcher carry out the study. The Director of the Aimhigher partnership and colleagues were notified of the study.

Phase II. September 2009-February 2010

Alongside acquiring ethical approval for the study, the gatekeepers were updated of the progress; their views were also sought on best ways to involve other staff and young people, and other practical considerations. Key contacts were identified and introductory meetings took place, to make sure the gatekeepers are on board. Unfortunately this period coincided with major restructuring in LAs and AP as a result of the Coalition Government reforms. As a result, certain processes took longer or had to be revisited as a result of staff leaving and initial links being lost. The process was also affected by the uncertainty of the future of Aimhigher, and, therefore, the mutual benefits of the collaboration.

Phase III. March – August 2011

Despite some difficulties outlined above, it was possible to start field work once the ethical approval has been granted. Information sheets and consent forms were delivered to the gatekeepers to be sent to the young people. Time scales, deadlines and other relevant details confirmed; arrangements were made for follow-ups and other communication. The decision was made to use the 'opt-in' approach with professionals and 'opt-out' approach with the young people in terms of expressing the wish to participate (or not to participate).

Phase IV. August 2011 – December 2011

The deadline was set for August 2011 as a 'cut-off' point for receiving letters from the target groups and for commencing the follow-up phone calls. At this point the response slips were received from the staff who expressed interest. Only one young person returned an opt-out slip. The gatekeeping organisations then released the names and numbers of the 136 young people (as described earlier in this chapter). The next step was to phone all interested professionals and 135 young people whose details were provided: as a confirmation for

professionals and as a follow-up phone call (from the letter that was sent prior to that) to the young person. The information in the information sheet and consent form was used for the telephone conversation. If the young person agreed to take part after the conversation, the documents were re-sent to them and the time and place of the interview was agreed.

As it turned out, a large proportion of the provided contact details were out of date, for both earlier and more recent participants. This was mostly the issue for the young people who had moved on from organisation in question (for example, the education unit or the designated team in the local authority). Another observation was that most of the young people who were reached on the number provided stated that they did not receive the letter from the gate keeping organisation.

As a result, 19 young people and 9 professionals were interviewed. It was initially envisaged to interview parents and carers; however, only one carer expressed interest. One young person also sent a brief letter describing her Aimhigher experience. Both carer interview transcript and the letter were added to the 'satellite' information (Appendix 3).

The interviews

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were chosen for their combination of a certain level of structure alongside flexibility and the focus on the interviewee's account (Bryman, 2008). Best efforts were made to accommodate the preferences of young people and professionals in terms of interview arrangements. Seventeen interviews with the young people were carried out in public places, including the local shopping mall, a café or the young person's

school. One young person (Zamir) was interviewed at his school, but in a separate quiet area, in the presence of a trusted member of staff. Two interviews took place at the young people's houses (Femi and Ajaz), as this was their preference.

The nature of semi-structured interviews allowed for the interviewees to frame the events in the way they understood them, and for the researcher to capture these. While the relative structure of the questions was followed, the researcher made sure that discussion is also guided by the topics that were of particular interest to the participants. This made the interviewees more comfortable and helped gain new insights and draw out new themes.

After conducting the first (pilot) interview, the decision was made to add the question around the young person's self-description with regards to the past and the present. This way the young people could describe themselves in the way they wanted, as the resilience scale seemed rather 'dry'; their answers provided rich qualitative data. This information was used in Chapter 6 (see also Figures 6:1 and 6:2). The researcher made reflective notes after every interview, recording how the interview went; observations and insights; suitability of the setting; lessons for the next interview.

At the start of the interview, the details of the research, anonymity and confidentiality were discussed. The researcher made sure that the participants were comfortable and felt free to skip the questions or stop the interview; the language was appropriate for the target group; leading questions were avoided. The researcher was aware of her dual role (researcher-practitioner) and ensured that bias was brought to a minimum (Roulston et al., 2003). At the end of the interview the young people were reminded who they can speak to if they

wanted to follow up any issues. Several participants were interested in the research project and found it important and worthwhile. Considering the vulnerable background of the young people, it was important for the researcher to be prepared to handle sensitive topics; however, for most of the interviews, this did not come up. One exception was the interview with Zamir (as described earlier in the chapter); although he insisted that he wanted to carry on. The member of staff who was present at the interview made it clear that she would stay with him for the rest of the day.

With regards to practical considerations, such as time keeping, suitability of the venue and turnout, most of the interviews went smoothly. On one occasion, however, the researcher had to wait at a train station twice for a young person who agreed to take part; follow-up phone calls led to rearranging with no success. Similarly, the researcher had to come twice to another young person's school; the researcher and the young person kept missing each other; as a result, the young person asked to be interviewed in his home. On the whole, however, the participants turned up on time and were ready to be interviewed. Many interviews were rather long, in consistence with the aim to capture the young people's stories; the high volume of data affected the transcribing time but was very helpful in drawing out themes and insights during analysis. Having spare batteries for the recorder proved useful.

Data Analysis

Three types of data were available for analysis (Appendix 3). The accounts of the nineteen young people in this study were supported by the information collected during the interviews with professionals in gate keeping organisations, who knew the young people and had an understanding of Aimhigher. Additionally, access was gained (through the Director of the Aimhigher partnership) to the

information that provided 'satellite' context, which was mainly comprised of pieces of creative writing, reflective diaries and feedback forms generated in the course of Aimhigher activities for vulnerable adolescents. Having access to this additional information was also necessary for triangulation purposes and for enhancing the transferability and reflexivity of the participants' accounts.

Organising the data

The core data came from nineteen semi-structured interviews with the young people and practitioners. The vast majority of interview data was audio recorded; notes were taken (during and after interview) where audio recording was not possible. All recorded interviews were transcribed manually and in full. Recently, some authors have argued against transcribing verbatim, in particular, in the case of mixed research methods (Halcomb and Davidson, 2006); working directly with audio and video material has been also advocated (Markle, West and Rich, 2011). However, it was decided that transcription is necessary in the view of the open-ended exploratory nature of the inquiry, as well as the volume and the richness of the collected data. Although time consuming, transcribing helped the researcher to familiarise herself with the data, which enhanced familiarity necessary for the data analysis (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009).

As already mentioned, the core data was complemented by the 'satellite' content which came through a number of Aimhigher-related feedback and reflective documents. The content in these documents was meant for public domain, as outlined in Aimhigher pre-event forms signed by participants; all data was already anonymous. The information that provided the 'satellite' setting featured poetry and creative writing. Qualitative literature views poetry as 'units' of information, and therefore, as research evidence (Shapiro, 2004; Furman, 2004). The researcher is dealing with multiple meanings of events and

interactions, experienced and shared by the young person in a meaningful way. Despite lack of reproducibility, patterns, connections and codes can be 'teased out' during analysis, thus allowing the researcher to interpret and present the data in the same way any qualitative data could (Shapiro, 2004). Furman et al. (2007, p.302) describe creative writing materials as "documents of social phenomena" that communicate "powerful and multiple truth about the human experience". All the materials (transcripts and 'satellite' context) were printed out and were used for preliminary manual coding in the early stages of data analysis. Appendix 3 provides an overview of the obtained information.

Drawing out the themes

The process of making sense of data was informed by the thematic analysis approach. Thematic analysis, also known as interpretive content analysis (Marks and Yardley, 2004; Schwandt, 2007) provided the guidance and the flexibility that this study required. Thematic analysis has been criticised for not being distinctive enough: its key principles can be found in several other approaches to data analysis, including content analysis, discourse analysis, narrative approach and grounded theory (Bryman, 2008).

However, the flexibility and broad scope of this approach was suitable for this inquiry, as it spans over several research themes, which require different approaches. The study operates on three different levels: life experiences of vulnerable young people; the mechanisms behind Aimhigher interventions; and the resilience framework as a backdrop for the two strands. The analysis, therefore, is guided by what is already known (the resilience framework, the issues around vulnerable young people; the remit of Aimhigher within policy) and what is not known (any potential impact of Aimhigher experience; its

relevance to resilience-related processes; any other themes that could emerge from the data).

Two approaches were used in the process of data analysis, both informed by theory and the 'raw' themes emerging out of the data; Richards and Richards (1995) describe these two approaches as top-down (theory driven) and bottom-up (data-driven). Themes, categories and codes were drawn from the resilience framework (featuring as resilience domains and factors in the interview schedule), as well as the insights emerging from the data itself. Within the adapted theoretical framework, the actual interactions and experiences and their subjective meaning to young people as social actors informed the approach to the data analysis (Denzin, 1992).

Following the participant-centred approach, close attention was paid to any data that could represent an emerging theme. Having fully transcribed interviews ensured that no data was missed. Additionally, using the method of line-by-line coding kept the researcher's attention on the data; this method is often associated with the Grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006). Applying these techniques illuminated certain themes in the young people's stories. One such theme was the young people's powerful emotional response as a part of making sense of events, as well as individuality of meanings of risk and protection in their lives (as described in Chapter 6). Similarly, the exploration of the meanings attached to the Aimhigher experience (by the young people and professionals) was almost completely guided by the data due to the lack of available research into the impact of Aimhigher, as well as scarce research around interventions informed by the resilience framework (Schofield and Beek, 2005).

In the process of data analysis, themes and clusters of themes had to be identified, deconstructed and then reconstructed, in order to map the data onto the key discourses around vulnerable young people. The latter include the understanding of transitions and the issues around being in care or in AP (movement, instability, the role of foster carers, education experiences). Similarly, the knowledge around Aimhigher (however conflicting) was used to further construct the understanding of its role and impact. Positioning these themes within the resilience framework allowed the researcher to connect separate strands of data, which aided the overall understanding of the mechanisms behind vulnerability and resilience patterns.

Data coding

In identifying the themes, categories and concepts, a mixture of manual and electronic coding was utilised. Preliminary manual coding was conducted, to familiarise oneself with the data; the key themes emerged at that stage. It also became clear that due to the amount of data and the potential overlap of themes and categories manual analysis was not the most efficient. The rich and thick nature of the collected data prompted the use of the NVivo9 software at the next stage. NVivo9 allowed the flexibility of connecting one unit of text with several themes, categories or nodes, without physically separating the transcripts and other materials, similar to initial coding in Grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). Additionally, the capacity of NVivo9 to create links between categories and themes, memos and word frequencies aided the exploration. The capacity of NVivo9 software to handle various types of data allowed the researcher to analyse interview transcripts, notes, descriptive information logged in SPSS (key information about the participants, derived from the transcripts) and 'satellite' content.

The techniques of open coding, in vivo and selective coding were utilised in stages (Straus and Corbin, 1990; Saldaña, 2011). Axial coding allowed to code relationships between categories. It was important to start drawing together the links and relationships with the help of axial coding towards the end of the exploration, once the key themes emerged and key concepts have been drawn out (Charmaz, 2006; Bryman, 2008).

It is necessary to point out, that alongside NVivo9 coding, an ongoing comparison and re-reading of typed-up transcripts was conducted. Constant comparison of data is key to maintaining the fluidity and the revision of emerging themes. While coding, grouping, looking for categories and conducting text search could be done quickly and accurately with the help of the software, it could not immerse the researcher into a participant's story in the same way as reading through the full transcript. In the words of Richards and Richards (1995, p.80),

“...categorising is never just an end in itself..... Its goals are often the discovery of ideas and themes; and the storing of growing understandings, the linking of ideas to data”.

Therefore, going over the transcripts numerous times was particularly useful for recreating the broader context. Additionally, the memo-making tool in NVivo9 was also helpful as it allowed the researcher to link notes (memos) to the parts of data. The memos were particularly useful in the final stages of the writing up.

A constant comparison between the data and the broader literature (on resilience, on the issues around vulnerable young people and the meaning of extra-curricular activities) aided the process of teasing out the themes and grounding them in broader research. The process of coding and analysing data required deconstructing the information into codes, which then were reconstructed into broader categories and themes. It was also important that the

researcher's own interpretations were kept to a minimum to avoid bias and to make sure the participants' perceptions and meanings come through (Charmaz, 2006). Additionally, the continuous use of participants' quotes in the discussion of the key themes also serves to support this intention (Guest and MacQueen, 2006).

Word clouds and life trajectory maps

As a part of making sense of data, word frequency counts were carried out for certain codes. For example, the word frequency count was used in the analysis of the participants' perceptions of self 'before Aimhigher' and 'after Aimhigher'. Alongside this, an infographic software tool was used for visual representation of these frequencies, known as a word cloud (Figures 6:2 and 6:3; see also Appendix 4). A word cloud is a

“...special visualisation tool of text in which the more frequently used words are effectively highlighted by occupying more prominence in the representation”

(McNaught and Lam, 2010, p.630).

As a visual depiction of word frequencies, word clouds are associated with content analysis and quantitative research. At the same time there is evidence of it being used in qualitative explorations. Cidell (2010, p.514) highlights that this *tool* provides “a powerful way to summarise and compare information from different places on a single issue”. As using a word cloud as a stand-alone tool may result in omitting important context, the researcher ensured that the meanings and perceptions were analysed within broader context; the tool was used merely to represent the data in a “fast and visually rich way” (McNaught and Lam, 2010, p.630). In Figures 6:2 and 6:3, the frequency of the word is

represented by its size (the larger the world, the more frequently it was mentioned).

The multi-layered nature of the study and the rich nature of the data called for the tools that capture this complexity, during analysis as well as writing up and presenting data. In order to link up meanings of single and clustered events, the young people's trajectories were presented in a shape of maps. Maps representing participants' life journeys, or trajectories have been used in social research with the aim to preserve the connections between interlinking factors, and processes, as well as events and changes across time (Hall, 2003; Davis, 2006; see also Ojermak, 2007).

Nineteen maps illustrate key events in the young people's lives before, during and after their participation in Aimhigher activities (Appendix 1). This was especially useful considering the study is an exploration into young people's resilience and its components, some of which are unique to each individual. The use of maps and timelines is beneficial and insightful where complex phenomena or connections between multiple factors are being explored. Jacklin et al. (2006) used timelines to demonstrate continuities and discontinuities in the chains of schooling and intervention experiences for children in care. Similarly, life trajectories in a study by Melrose and Brodie (2000) provided a vivid illustration of the interconnection and cumulative effect of traumatic life events of vulnerable young people.

The life trajectory maps allowed the researcher to capture and analyse several important details. Firstly, all mentioned events and factors were positioned according to the understanding of risk and protective factors within the resilience domains. Positioning of these factors was informed by the literature

that underpinned the study (discussed in Chapter 2). Secondly, the subjective meanings of risk and protection as featured in the young people's accounts were also represented on the maps. This can be seen in Arthur's life trajectory map, where moving house and moving schools was disruptive but resulted in his grades improving as the new school was a "better school". Lastly, the maps aided the visual representation of connections between events, which formed clusters and chain reactions, for example, a death of a family member, which was followed by a change in behaviour and school exclusion (Amelie).

Additionally, single factors (events, processes and people) were connected according to a specific resilience domain, for example, the presence of supportive people (peers, professionals, family members) in a young person's life. For example, Femi's map shows the consistency of support he received from "mentors, school, parents", as well as friends and Connexions professionals. This part of the data analysis was helpful in drawing out two key themes of support networks and opportunities, featured in Chapter 8. Finally, the maps feature the turning points (King, Brown and Smith, 2003; Edwards and McKenzie, 2005; Johnson and Howard, 2007) and key people in the young people's lives. These are typed underscored in capital letters. For example, in the case of Claire, moving back to her home town and reconnecting with her friend were the key events in her life within that time frame.

It was important to follow the research questions, as well as do justice to the young people's stories and the key themes that emerge out of these stories. Chapter 6 uncovers the young people's past experiences and their emotional response to adversity. Following this, Chapter 7 discusses participation in Aimhigher activity, its significance to the young people and the mechanisms behind its impact. Chapter 8 rounds up the discussion of the findings the participants' journeys through life, by highlighting the interdependence of

certain processes, factors and events, which underpin vulnerability and resilience. In keeping with the principle of being led by the young people's 'voice', it was important to preserve the 'true' meaning of the participants' accounts by using their own words (Ungar, 2003). The use of participants' quotations adds richness and depth to the narrative (Corden and Sainsbury, 2006). Guest and MacQueen (2006, p.217) recommend the use of quotations as they "exemplify an intended concept" and "reflect the raw data behind the interpretation".

Conclusion

This chapter discusses the methodology, applied in this study, including both theoretical and practical considerations. The open-ended nature of the exploration aims to position the role of Aimhigher initiative and its potential impact within the broader context of the resilience concept and its applications. At the same time, the element of an individual perspective is equally paramount. In fact, it is the individual perspective of the participants that enables the researcher to obtain new meanings of the Aimhigher experience. Positioning the investigation within the symbolic interactionist approach allows capturing the elements of both the individual and the environment, and the interactions between the two. Furthermore, the key principles of the interactionist approach interlace with the understanding of the resilience framework, which also highlights the interconnectedness of the two domains, the internal and the external.

This chapter also highlights the practical mechanisms of conducting the exploration. These include the ethical and practical considerations around working with vulnerable young people, the researcher-practitioner duality, the

complexities of building relationships and gaining access. Indeed, objective obstacles and challenges form an inseparable part of the process, which may affect time scales and the running of the project.

Reflexivity is an inseparable part of the research process. The latter presented valuable insights with regards to understanding the sensitivity and the emotional investment around the researcher-practitioner domain. Another insight involves the broader understanding around the role of adults in promoting the child-centred approach and sense of agency in the young people (for example, during interviews).

This study features a strong exploratory element (with regards to the impact of Aimhigher), as well as the resilience framework, which brings a certain structure to the investigation. Using the relatively broad thematic analysis framework allowed the researcher to combine both top-down (theory driven) and bottom-up (data-driven) approaches (Richards and Richards, 1995).

During the course of the research, dissemination involved workshops and presentations at national and local conferences, including the 'Outcomes and Impacts' University of Bedfordshire Conference in 2011 and 'Discourses of Inclusion in Higher Education' WP Conference in 2012. Prior to that, a published chapter on history of family and childhood also contributed to the project (Barrett and Kukhareva, 2010).

The next chapter focuses on the characteristics of the nineteen people who took part in this study. The discussion positions the sample within the LACYP and AP population.

5 Participants of the study

Introduction

Following the discussion around the methodology of the study, this chapter focuses on the nineteen young people that took part in the study and their characteristics. Although this is a qualitative study, it is still important to establish how representative it is of the wider research, practice and policy context.

Vulnerable groups are sometimes referred to as 'hard-to-reach' (Henry and Polson, 2007; Wilkinson et al., 2009; NFER, 2012). This description refers not only to practice, but also to research, as they often find themselves on the margins of the support provision and the society. Frequent moves and inconsistency of data make access to these groups more difficult.

The 'slipping through the net' trend (Doherty and Stott, 2004) was also noticeable in the work of Aimhigher. As mentioned in Chapter 3, young people looked after or and in alternative education may have missed out on the support they were entitled to as a result of professional (mis)judgement or simply due to the challenges around building collaborative provision. Similarly, although it was possible to find examples of Aimhigher activities organised for these groups, they did not feature in Aimhigher evaluation literature.

With a view to address this lack of evidence, this study focuses specifically on the Aimhigher experiences of young people who have been placed in care or in alternative education. Their accounts are presented in detail in Chapter 6, Chapter 7 and Chapter 8. This chapter plays a role of an introduction of the participants, as the three following chapters focus on answering the research questions and examining the key themes that come through the interview data. It also be used as a reference for the data analysis discussion, as the stories and accounts of the young people interlace the discussion, connecting with each other and creating a 'collective' narrative.

Characteristics of the young people

Nineteen young people were interviewed for this study; ten participants were male and nine were female. As Figure 5:1 demonstrates, the age of participants (at the time of interview) varies, with the two youngest participants being fourteen and the two oldest participants being twenty years old. Although the age range was not a part of the initial research design, this variety was particularly valuable for the aims of this study, as it provided retrospective accounts covering different time periods. This allowed the research to explore the impact of Aimhigher several months after the experience (younger participants), as well as several years after the experience (older participants). This element contributed to the understanding of both short term and long-term impact; it also made it possible to position the Aimhigher experience within a wider range of factors, events and processes over time.

Out of the nineteen participants, fourteen young people came from a care background; at the time of the interview eight of them had left care, while six were living with foster carers. The remaining five were living with their family and did not have history of public care. All five came into contact with Aimhigher

as a result of collaborative work between the initiative and alternative education schools.

This said, there is crossover between being in care and having history of being educated outside of mainstream education. Eight young people out of nineteen had history of both being looked after and having a disrupted education experience, be it moving schools, having gaps in education, exclusion or referral to a school for children with special needs. In fact, one young person (Thomas) took part in more than one Aimhigher activity as he was referred separately through his school and by his social worker. Although this points to some disjointedness in targeting young people, it resulted in the young person not being 'missed' in the process of Aimhigher cohort identification (as described in Chapter 3).

Out of the nineteen participants, four reported history of school exclusion. Two of them, Lee and Femi, did not come from care and lived with their families. Whilst Femi was reintegrated back at his state-funded mainstream school at the time of the interview, Lee was going to an alternative school for pupils with learning disabilities and emotional and behavioural difficulties. According to the data presented by DfE (DfE, 2012a), 54 per cent of students with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties faced a fixed term exclusion in 2009-10. Overall, six young people in the sample either had history of or were in education provision for students with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

The other two (Thomas and Amelie) come from a care background. This represents over 10 per cent of the sample (for comparison). It should be noted that it was not specified whether the exclusion was of temporary or permanent nature. At the same time, as shown by DfE (2012a) this figure is similar to the national statistic for fixed exclusion rate for the looked after population; namely,

it was 9.2 per cent during 2009-10. In comparison, the same statistic for non-looked after children is 2.4 per cent. With regards to the permanent exclusion rate, it was 0.2 per cent for looked after children, which was twice as high as the number of non-looked after children. The overlap between being in care and being in alternative education can be related to a number of issues. It has been widely documented that there is a higher correlation between being looked after and having a learning disability, as well as emotional and behavioural difficulty; there is also a link between belonging to certain ethnic groups and being in care (Chater and Le Grand, 2006; DfE, 2012a).

According to Chater and Le Grand (2006) just under a third of all looked after population have a special education needs statement (SEN) in comparison with just one tenth of that figure (just 3 per cent) for the general population.

Although the young people were not asked about having special education needs explicitly, one young person (Stephen) stated that he always suspected he had dyslexia but “never got diagnosed” at school. At the time of the interview, he was planning to get an assessment done at university. His story is consistent with Chater and Le Grand (2006, p.7), who state that “it can be difficult to obtain a SEN statement for Looked after children, and it can take longer to implement them”.

Figure 5:1 Characteristics of the young people

Name and age of participant	Gender	Ethnicity	Special needs	Looked after of care leaver at the time of interview	History of exclusion / movement to a special school	History of gaps in education / moving schools
Carl , 19	Male	African-Caribbean	not reported	Care leaver	not reported	Gaps in education
Arthur, 20	Male	White British	not reported	Care leaver	not reported	moving schools
Stephen, 20	Male	White British	not reported	Care leaver	not reported	not reported
Amelie, 18	Female	Mixed race	not reported	Care leaver	exclusion	both
Alexandra, 16	Female	White British	not reported	LACYP	not reported	not reported
Jodie, 17	Female	White British	not reported	LACYP	not reported	not reported
Ajaz, 15	Male	Pakistani	not reported	LACYP	not reported	not reported
Femi, 16	Male	African-Caribbean	not reported	no	exclusion	not reported
Claire, 18	Female	White British	not reported	Care leaver	not reported	both
Anita, 17	Female	Mixed race	not reported	Care leaver	EBD school	both
Rowena, 18	Female	White British	not reported	Care leaver	not reported	both
Saleem, 18	Male	Afghani	not reported	LACYP	not reported	gaps in education
Stephanie , 20	Female	White British	not reported	Care leaver	not reported	not reported

Figure 5:1 (continued) Characteristics of the young people

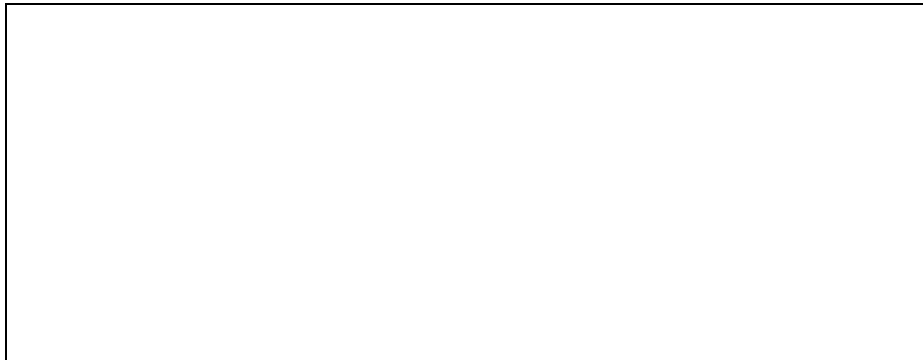
Name and age of participant	Gender	Ethnicity	Special needs	Looked after of care leaver at the time of interview	History of exclusion / movement to a special school	History of gaps in education / moving schools
Thomas, 15	Male	African-Caribbean	EBD	LACYP	both	both
Lee, 15	Male	White British	EBD	no	both	both
Davina, 14	Female	White British	Asperger syndrome	no	EBD school	moving schools
Tony, 15	Male	White British	Autism	no	EBD school	moving schools
Lorraine, 14	Female	White British	not reported	no	EBD school	moving schools
Zamir, 16	Male	Not reported	Not reported	LACYP	Not reported	School age wrongly assessed

While the percentage of White children in the looked after population is representative of the overall children population in England, the number of Black and Black British children in care is three times higher than the name of the children of the same origin in the general population (Harker, 2012).

Additionally, as demonstrated in Figure 5:3, young people of Black and mixed origin are overrepresented in the excluded population; as well as in the Children in Need population and on the Child Protection Register (Owen and Statham, 2009; DfE, 2012a; NSPCC, 2012). According to the report published by the Owen and Statham (2009), the factors at play are deprivation, poverty and isolation, alongside the availability of adoptive parents or foster carers.

At the same time, children of Asian background are under-represented in these populations. It has been acknowledged in the literature that the reason for this under-representation may lie in the lack of appropriately targeted support available for the ethnic minority families (see, for example, O'Neale, 2000; Becher and Husain, 2003; Greene et al., 2008). Additionally, it has also been noted that this lack of appropriate services is being exacerbated by the existence of socio-economic and cultural barriers that prevent these families from making contact with the relevant service providers (Becher and Husain, 2003). In addition to this, both trends may be indirectly supported by the professionals' practices and their underlying subjective attitudes (Owen and Statham, 2009).

Figure 5:2 Average ethnicity disproportionality index (Owen and Statham, 2009, p.25)



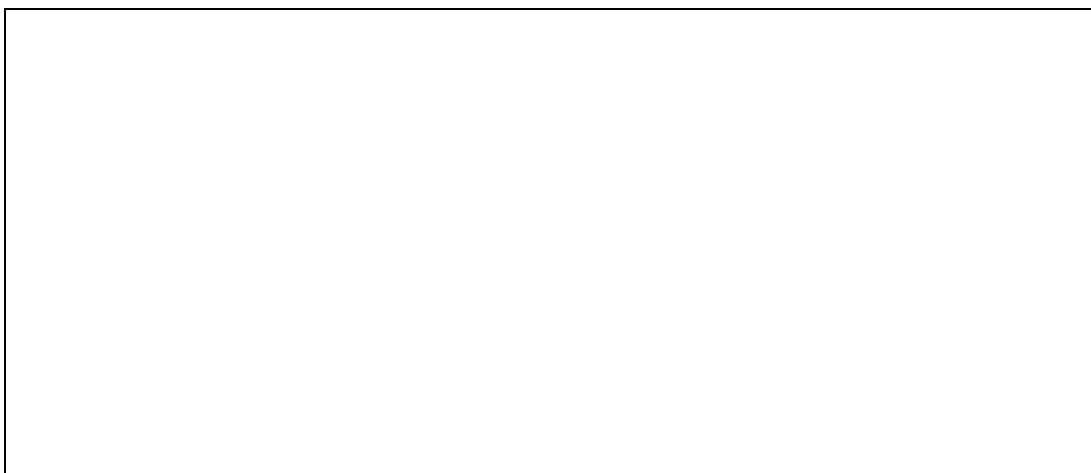
With regards to the 'looked after' group in this study, seven young people were White British (around 36 per cent); two were from Afro-Caribbean background (just over 10 per cent); two were of mixed origin (just over 10 per cent). The figure for the children of Black/ Black British and Mixed origin is comparable with the national statistics (respectively, 7 and 9 per cent); at the same time, the percentage of White looked after children in the sample is only around a half of national percentage, which is 77 per cent (DfE, 2010a; Harker, 2012). There are several possible reasons behind the lower representation of the White participants in this (very small) sample, including the characteristics of the groups that took part in Aimhigher activities and the demographics of the local area.

One young person in the group was of Pakistani origin; one young person was of Afghani origin (Saleem). It was not possible to obtain ethnicity details for Zamir. However, what was known is that both Saleem and Zamir came to Britain from a different country in search for asylum; also, Zamir was fostered by a Pakistani family. According to DfE (2010a), while the number of black unaccompanied asylum seekers in England has been decreasing, the opposite trend was observed for the unaccompanied asylum seekers of Asian origin; they are also

predominantly male. Two asylum seeking children represent a relatively high proportion of the looked after group (14 per cent), while the national statistic for all asylum seeking children in care is around 5 per cent of all care population (2 per cent for Asian asylum seeking children).

Apart from the 14 young people who were, or had been in care, five young people were not being looked after and lived with their families. Out of these five, one young person (Femi) came into contact with Aimhigher during the time of a fixed-term exclusion; at the time of the interview he was attending a mainstream school. The other four young people were in AP, aimed at a range of students, including those with learning disabilities, emotional and behavioural difficulties, those excluded and school refusers. One of these young people (Lee) reported that he had a history of school exclusion in the past. In addition to this, two young people from a care background (Anita and Claire) had histories of attending alternative education.

Figure 5:3 Characteristics of permanently excluded pupils in England 2009-2010 (DfE, 2012, p. 32)



As already described earlier in this chapter, there is an evident overlap between being in care, being excluded and having learning, emotional and behavioural difficulties. These characteristics frequently coexist with deprivation and poverty. As Figure 5:3 illustrates, the exclusion rate is higher for students who receive free meals. There is also an obvious overlap with having special education needs and ethnicity (namely, Black Caribbean origin). For example, in 2009-10, all pupils with special education needs accounted for almost 75 per cent of all permanent exclusions (with only half of that percentage not having FSM or being Black Caribbean). At the same time, only 15.8 per cent of all excluded students did not belong to SEN, FSM or Black Caribbean category (DfE, 2012a).

Accommodation

All the non-looked after participants lived with their family at the time of the interview (five in total). They also represent the younger part of the group, aged fourteen or fifteen years of age.

Out of the fourteen young people from care backgrounds, five young people lived with their foster carers, the age of this group ranges from fifteen (Thomas) to seventeen (Jodie). The majority of children in care nationally are in foster placements; for example, in 2011 74 per cent of all looked after population were in foster care.

Eight care leavers lived independently, with the youngest person being seventeen years old (Anita), and the oldest being twenty years old (Arthur). Leaving care and the associated transition into independent is associated with many challenges for these young people. According to NCAS (2013), 15 per cent of all looked after children have to leave their placement at the age of 16; this

represents nine thousand care leavers. Overall, as stated by the Nationwide Association of Fostering Providers (2012), “twice as many care leavers as other young adults expected to move out”. Over 40 per cent of care leavers aged 19 live independently, compared to only 20 per cent of the rest of the population aged 18-24.

All of the care leavers lived with foster carers before they started living independently; two of them (Carl and Amelie) also mention staying in a children’s home for a period of time. Evidence suggests that the number of children placed in Children’s homes has been declining and constituted only 9 per cent of the whole looked after population in 2010-11 (Berridge, Biehal and Henry, 2012).

Education

At the time of the interview the information was obtained with regards to the young people’s education status. This was in line with one of the resilience domains (educational attainment, see Chapter 2); as well as the young people’s understanding of the remit of Aimhigher.

Eighteen participants were in education or had a place allocated in further or HE. One young person who was not in education was Saleem. As an unaccompanied asylum seeker, Saleem was awaiting the decision with regards to this status (he was eighteen at the time of the interview). He expressed the wish to stay in the UK, go to university and get a job. However, his plans may have been interrupted or not realised, as there is still a proportion of young people who are refused the leave to remain as they turn eighteen (The Children’s Society, 2008). Moreover,

in 2008 as many as 17 per cent of all asylum seeking children were refused asylum and not granted leave to remain (The Children's Legal Centre, 2013).

Eight (younger) participants were going to school at the time of the interview; most of them were at pre-GCSE stage (in Y10 or Y11) and were preparing for their exams. Five participants were in FE; three of them were awaiting a confirmation of their place at university. Four young people were already in HE; these were the older participants in the group. These details are presented in Figure 5:4.

These numbers present a positive picture of the young people achieving and getting on in the education system. Out of all the participants from care background, three were still in compulsory education, whilst the other eleven were in college or university. As already mentioned, only Saleem was out of education, but reported to have attended college in the past. However, the national statistics for the looked after population is far from positive. According to the Poverty Site (2011), a quarter of all LACYP obtain no qualifications. Additionally, a further quarter obtain fewer than five GCSEs or equivalent - compared to less than 10 per cent of the non-looked after population. Around 30 per cent of all young people in care are not in education, employment or training.

Figure 5:4 Participants' journey through education

Name and age of participant	Looked after of care leaver at the time of interview	History of exclusion / movement to a special school	History of gaps in education / moving schools	Education status at time of interview (school / college / university/ other	Where they are living (at time of interview)
Carl , 19	Care leaver	not reported	Gaps in education	University	independent
Arthur, 20	Care leaver	not reported	moving schools	University	independent
Stephen, 20	Care leaver	not reported	not reported	University	independent
Amelie, 18	Care leaver	exclusion	both	College	independent
Alexandra, 16	LACYP	not reported	not reported	College	foster placement
Jodie, 17	LACYP	not reported	not reported	College	Foster placement
Ajaz, 15	LACYP	not reported	not reported	Mainstream school	foster placement
Femi, 16	no	exclusion	not reported	Mainstream school	family
Claire, 18	Care leaver	not reported	both	Applying to university	independent
Anita, 17	Care leaver	EBD school	both	College; applying to university	independent

Figure 5:4 (continued) Participants' journey through education

Name and age of participant	Looked after of care leaver at the time of interview	History of exclusion / movement to a special school	History of gaps in education / moving schools	Education status at time of interview (school / college / university/ other	Where they are living (at time of interview)
Rowena, 18	Care leaver	not reported	both	College; applying to HE	family
Saleem, 18	LACYP	not reported	gaps in education	looking for work, taking a year out from college	independent
Stephanie, 20	Care leaver	not reported	not reported	University	independent
Thomas, 15	LACYP	both	both	Alternative education unit	foster placement
Lee, 15	no	both	both	Alternative education unit	family
Davina, 14	no	EBD school	moving schools	Alternative education unit	family
Tony, 15	no	EBD school	moving schools	Alternative education unit	family
Lorraine, 14	no	EBD school	moving schools	Alternative education unit	family
Zamir, 16	LACYP	Not reported	School age wrongly assessed	Mainstream school	Foster care

With regards to the non-looked after young people who were in AP, the picture is less straightforward, as alternative education encompasses provision for pupils with a wide range of complex needs. However, as was established earlier in this chapter, there is an overlap with being in care, having a learning disability or emotional and behavioural difficulties. According to DfE (2010b), despite a gradual improvement, only 14.5 per cent of students with SEN achieved at least five GCSEs in 2009; at the same time, the figure for non- SEN students was over 60 per cent. The trend continues as they get older: young people with SEN are four to five times less likely to go to university in comparison with their peers without SEN (DfE, 2010b). For the young people leaving care, 30 per cent were in FE in 2010 and around 6 per cent of 19 year old care leavers were in HE (NCAS, 2011). This figure constitutes only 15 per cent of the overall university population at the age of 19.

Taking part in Aimhigher activity

As already mentioned in Chapter 4, the tailored Aimhigher provision in the area in question was delivered to at least 136 young people from care or alternative education background during the time between 2007 and 2011. Out of this group, 84 young people took part in activities specifically tailored around the care provision; 52 young people participated in activities for the young people outside mainstream education. However, as the discussion earlier in this chapter demonstrates, this division is not straightforward, as there is a significant overlap in categories associated with several vulnerable groups.

Although the remit of Aimhigher stretched from ages of 13 to 30, and half-way through its existence involved work at primary level, most Aimhigher activities were delivered around two particular transition stages in the education system. The content and purpose of the activities was aimed at supporting academic

transition during KS3 and KS4, which would include learners aged 13-15; and during the post-compulsory stage (i.e. for learners aged 16-18). Out of nineteen participants, six young people were either going through, or have just completed their transition between KS3 and KS4. The remaining twelve, aged 17-20, had already left school and were pursuing post-compulsory options. All participants in the study had their first intervention when they were 13-15; for those who took part in more than one Aimhigher activity, the second intervention occurred around Y11, or after that. For activities organised for learners in mainstream schools, Aimhigher interventions were generally not delivered to learners in Y11 in order not to take them away from preparation for their GCSE exams. The practice was different with young people educated outside mainstream education as their curriculum, content and pace of study varied. One exception in the study is Arthur, who came into contact with Aimhigher during his post-sixteen transition from foster care into living independently.

This relatively wide age distribution between participants is very helpful, as it allows the researcher to explore, amongst other factors, both short-term, and long-term impact of Aimhigher experience. For example, Tony, Lorraine, Davina and Lee were interviewed just a few months after taking part in Aimhigher activity. For others, like Femi, Anita, Alexandra and Jodie it was a matter of year, or two years since their experience. And, finally, for the 'older' participants in the group, like Carl, Amelie, Arthur, Stephen, Rowena, Saleem and Stephanie their Aimhigher experience took them back several years. This provides a useful distribution in time of experiences and memories, as it allows the researcher to position the Aimhigher experience within trajectories and time frames of different length. This variation is helpful in exploring young people's lives in terms of developing resilient patterns over time (as described in Chapter 2). Each participant's age at the interview, as well as their age at the time of taking part in Aimhigher activity is detailed in Appendix 1 and Figure 5:4.

At this point, it may be useful to introduce specific activities, which were available to children looked after and outside mainstream education in that particular area. As already outlined in Chapter 3, Aimhigher activities varied across the country and were designed in collaboration with wider partnerships, in order to respond to the local needs. Figure 5:5 provides description of the events that the participants of this study took part in.

Figure 5:5 Aimhigher activities accessed by the participants of the study

Activity	Duration	Residential	Details
SS 1 Summer school 1	3-5 days	Mostly (may vary)	A collaboration and local FE/ HE provider, the social services and the young people. Designed with a view raise the awareness and aspirations of LACYP with regards to progression to HE. Involved a strong outdoor element. Ran every year
SS 2 Summer school 2	3-4 days	Mostly (may vary)	A collaboration and local FE/ HE provider, the social services and the young people. Designed with a view to meet the needs of young people leaving care and to prepare them for independent living. Involved an outdoor element. Ran every year
SS3 Summer school 3	3-5	Mostly (may vary)	Designed in collaboration with local FE/HE provider, alternative education providers, creative contributors, young people. Aimed at students who are disengaged from education and are interested in creative subjects (music, art, photography, dance, drama, poetry). Involved an outdoor element. Ran every year
SS4 Summer school 4	5 days	Non-residential	An experimental participatory photography project, designed with creative contributors and alternative providers. Aimed at the young people in alternative provision. Ran in the last year of the Aimhigher initiative, therefore, was not repeated. Involved an outdoor element.
SS5 Summer school 5	3-5 days	Varied	Designed in collaboration with a number of providers, including the LA; and the young people. Aimed specifically at male learners of Black and Black British origin with a view to raise their aspirations and attainment. Ran every year

Figure 5:5 (continued) Aimhigher activities accessed by the participants of the study

Activity	Duration	Residential	Details
Trip 1	5	Residential	An aspirational trip, which fitted a higher aspirational agenda. Involved a mixture of students, including LACYP. Young people from care background were recruited with the help of the social services. Ran once as it was tied in with a larger event. Included various strands of follow-up activity, one of which was ambassador work, carried out by the young people who took part
Ambassador work	Multiple	Non-residential	On-going follow-up activity, which formed a part of the legacy of the Trip 1 activity. Young people who took part delivered aspirational talks and shared their experience in local schools
MS 1 Mentoring scheme 1	Multiple	Non-residential	Designed in collaboration with social services in a form of a 'homework club'. Aimhigher ambassadors assisted looked after children with their homework in an informal environment
MS 2 Mentoring scheme 2	Multiple	Non-residential	Delivered outside mainstream education as a part of the national Aimhigher Associates scheme. Designed in collaboration with alternative providers, tailored to suit the needs of their learners
Campus visit	1	Non-residential	Designed as a one-off activity for mainstream schools, this event was normally a follow-up activity after a series of events with vulnerable young people. In this particular case, the young people spent a day on campus as a follow-up from a series of other activities, including a summer school. Took place whenever relevant

As Figures 5:5 and 5:6 illustrate, despite relatively small numbers of participants from disadvantaged groups (136 took part in activities designed specifically for

LACYP/ Alternative education), there was quite a variety of interventions available specifically for these young people. In fact, there were 5 summer schools, two mentoring schemes and three other types of activity, designed and delivered in collaboration with other providers. Such varied provision supports the discussion around flexibility of funding and direction of provision in Chapter 3. Similarly, it echoes some of the professionals' accounts around this flexibility (Chapter 7). At the same time, as mentioned in Chapter 3, evidence was found to suggest that other partnerships ran similarly unique and tailored interventions in their areas. It is disappointing that the mechanisms behind these interventions, including collaborative work and the potential impact on the young people, have not been captured in research.

Figure 5:6 Participation in Aimhigher activity

Name and age of participant	Gender	Looked after of care leaver at the time of interview	History of exclusion and /or movement to a special school	Agency that referred them to AH	Age at the time of taking part in Aimhigher activity	Activity 1 (around KS 3-4)	Activity 2 (KS 3-4, 4-5)
Carl , 19	Male	Care leaver	not reported	Social services	16,17	SS 1	SS 2
Arthur, 20	Male	Care leaver	not reported	Social services	18	SS 2	n/a
Stephen, 20	Male	Care leaver	not reported	Social services	16, 17, 18	SS 1	Trip 1
Amelie, 18	Female	Care leaver	exclusion	Social services	14, 15	SS 1	SS 2
Alexandra, 16	Female	LACYP	not reported	Social services	15	SS 1	n/a
Jodie, 17	Female	LACYP	not reported	Social services	15	SS 1	n/a
Ajaz, 15	Male	LACYP	not reported	Social services	15	SS 1	n/a
Femi, 16	Male	no	exclusion	PRU	15	SS 3	SS 5
Claire, 18	Female	Care leaver	not reported	Alternative provider	16	MS 2	Campus visit
Anita, 17	Female	Care leaver	EBD school	Social services, Alternative provider	14,15	MS 1 , SS 1	SS 3
Rowena, 18	Female	Care leaver	not reported	social services	17	SS 1	n/a
Saleem, 18	Male	LACYP	not reported	Social services	16	SS 1	n/a

Figure 5:6 (continued) Participation in Aimhigher activity

Name and age of participant	Gender	Looked after of care leaver at the time of interview	History of exclusion and /or movement to a special school	Agency that referred them to AH	Age at the time of taking part in Aimhigher activity	Activity 1 (around KS 3-4)	Activity 2 (KS 3-4, 4-5)
Stephanie, 20	Female	Care leaver	not reported	Social services	17	Trip 1	ambassadorial work
Thomas, 15	Male	LACYP	both	Social services, Alternative provider	15	SS 1	SS 4
Lee, 15	Male	no	both	Alternative provider	14	SS 4	Campus visit
Davina, 14	Female	no	EBD school	Alternative provider	14	SS 4	Campus visit
Tony, 15	Male	no	EBD school	Alternative provider	14	SS 4	Campus visit
Lorraine, 14	Female	no	EBD school	Alternative provider	14	SS 4	Campus visit
Zamir, 16	Male	LACYP	Not reported	Social services	14	SS 1	n/a

It has also been mentioned in Chapter 3, that accessing Aimhigher provision, as well as other developmental opportunities can be more difficult for the young people looked after and outside mainstream education. Indeed, all the participants of this study took part in Aimhigher activity as a result of direct contact between Aimhigher staff and the gate keepers in the social services or local centres of alternative education. As shown in Figure 5:6, eight young people took part in LACYP-specific activity as a result of being referred by a social worker, whereas six young people were referred by staff in their (alternative) place of education, for an activity, specifically designed for students in similar circumstances. Interestingly, the remaining two, Anita and Thomas, had been

approached by both social services and their teachers, thus engaging in two 'types' of interventions. It is also significant as Anita and Thomas were not the only young people in the group representing both the 'looked after' and the 'educated outside mainstream' populations.

All of these young people took part in at least one Aimhigher activity: for most of them (16), it was a summer school, designed around the needs of either children in or leaving care, or children in AP. Ten young people took part in a summer school SS 1 (designed for looked after children). Three of them (Carl, Amelie, Alexandra) then went on to another summer school (SS 2) which focused on transition from care onto independence. Arthur also took part in SS 2, although for him this was his first encounter with Aimhigher.

Two girls, both from care and alternative education background, took part in a mentoring scheme. Anita took part in a mentoring scheme MS 1, designed to boost attainment of LACYP in a form of an informal 'homework club'. Claire took part in a mentoring scheme MS 2, which was aimed at raising awareness and aspirations of young people who were placed outside mainstream education. The table also captures activity which can be described in terms of relational agency (Edwards and McKenzie, 2005), whereby the participants took part in activities aimed at supporting other young people. Stephanie took part in ambassadorial work after she went on an aspirational trip with Aimhigher. The ambassadorial work was carried out in local schools and colleges, where Stephanie and other young people delivered aspirational talks to young people and staff.

For some of these young people, the follow-up involvement went beyond being a part of the Aimhigher intervention. Three young people (Carl, Stephen and Anita)

assisted Aimhigher staff in developing and designing activities for vulnerable groups (summer schools SS1, SS2, SS3, SS4, SS5). All three also worked as facilitators at several summer schools.

Professionals interviewed

As already mentioned, the access to the young people was gained through the gate keeping organisations. These organisations were instrumental in creating collaborative provision and recruiting the young people for Aimhigher activities aimed at vulnerable young people. Several professionals from these organisations agreed to take part in the research. As illustrated in Figure 5:7, nine professionals were interviewed. All of these professionals played a role in selecting young people for Aimhigher activities; additionally, all of them attended or took part in at least one Aimhigher activity. Each of these practitioners knew at least one person interviewed for this study. Therefore, overall they had knowledge both of the Aimhigher initiative and the way the young people engage with it; as well as something of the impact it may have had on the participants of this research.

Two professionals, John and Sarah, represent the LA: John was a social worker and Sarah was employed as a Virtual Head. The other seven participants were employed by three different alternative education providers in a teaching-related capacity. Sandra worked for a PRU; Samantha worked for a charitable organisation that supported disadvantaged young people. Becky, Michael, Kevin and Anne worked for an alternative education school for learners with EBD issues, including school refusers. Their organisation was not directly funded by the LA.

Figure 5:7 Professionals interviewed for the study

Name	Field of work	Referred young people for Aimhigher intervention	Attended Aimhigher activity	Knows young people in the sample
John	Local Authority (social worker)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sarah	Local authority (Virtual Head)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Anne	School for pupils with EBD (teaching staff)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kevin	School for pupils with EBD (teaching staff)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sandra	Pupil referral unit (Teaching staff)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Becky	School for pupils with EBD (teaching staff)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Michael	School for pupils with EBD (teaching staff)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kate	School for pupils with EBD (teaching staff)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Samantha	Alternative education provider (a charity) for disadvantaged young people	Yes	Yes	Yes

As shown in Figure 5:7, there is diversity in the background and characteristics of the practitioners, who took part in the study. They represent different organisations and were employed in different capacities. This variety is helpful for two reasons. It serves as an example of collaborative partnership work that

went on in local Aimhigher areas. Additionally, the fact that these practitioners took part in Aimhigher activity and knew some of the young people in the study adds extra value to the findings.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the characteristics of the participants of this study. Although this was not a random sample, it is still important to understand how the characteristics of these young people can be related to the overall population of the young people in care and in alternative education.

The statistical data that underpins the discussion demonstrates that the sample is reasonably representative of the overall population of children placed in care and outside mainstream education. The link between poverty, disadvantage, special education needs and ethnicity with regards to the sample has also been explored. Overall, several young people have histories of both care and exclusion; several young people have SEN or EBD. Several young people had gaps in education. Two young people in the looked after group came to the UK in search of asylum.

Despite these challenges, however, it seems that the young people in the sample are doing very well in terms of their education. With all but one of them being in compulsory, further or HE, at the time of the interview, the group definitely 'beats the trend'. The exception is one eighteen-year-old young person, who was waiting for the decision on his status as an asylum seeker. Otherwise, he showed clear aspirations with regards to having qualifications and a career. Of course, the fact that a large proportion of the sample were in further and HE may be linked to a number of reasons. It is useful to remember that certain selection

criteria had been used by the gate keepers, when they were referring them for Aimhigher participation. Additionally, this may be linked to the characteristics of the young people who self-selected themselves for taking part in this study. At the same time, however, it has been acknowledged in literature that disadvantaged young people have high aspirations, but are often prevented from realising them (Creegan, 2008; NCAS, 2010). Therefore, it is argued, that with the appropriate and consistent support each of these young people can achieve; this is discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

In addition to the characteristics of the young people, details of the professionals participating in the study are also presented. Overall, nine practitioners represent several different organisations that were a part of the local Aimhigher collaborative provision. The fact that all of these practitioners attended Aimhigher activities and knew some of the young people in the sample adds value to the data.

This chapter also presents an overview of the Aimhigher activities these young people took part in, the range of the activities and the channels through which they were able to access these activities. As mentioned previously in Chapter 3, the access to these interventions was very much determined by the type and level of collaboration between Aimhigher and the gate keepers; additionally, professional judgement of the gate keepers also played a part. Over the period of time between 2007 and 2011, 136 young people participated in projects tailored to the needs of those looked after and outside mainstream education. For such a relatively small number of participants over four years, 10 different types of tailored activity were available in the local area in question.

Some of the elements of these activities echo the examples of provision for disadvantaged learners, designed by other areas, described in Chapter 3. It is, perhaps, rather disappointing, that this provision has not been explored in terms of collaborative links that supported it, its mechanisms or impact on the young people. Chapter 7 seeks to address this gap. First, however, Chapter 6 focuses on the participants' journeys and transitions through life, with the particular focus on the care and the education system.

6 Changes and challenges

Introduction

As outlined in Chapter 1, this study sets out to establish whether participation in Aimhigher activity had a role to play in contributing to resilience building in young people in care and alternative education. Before this can be done, it is important to determine whether there has been a change of any kind in the participants or their lives, and to explore the meanings of this change in relation to resilience domains. 'Change' simply signifies a different state of something or someone; however, in order for that change to manifest as a state, change as a process should have occurred beforehand. Change is, therefore, not a one-off event, but something that happens over time. Moreover, the participant's awareness of this change (and degree of change) may emerge gradually. It is important to recognise that this study captures the change as it is perceived by the individual at a specific moment in time.

It is useful to distinguish different changes that take place in the lives of young people. Firstly, change is a part of everyday life, including the process of growing up and simply living, such as moving house, changing friendships or taking part in new activities. Secondly, for most teenagers in the United Kingdom, some events and experiences are a part of a 'normal' transition through adolescence, with emotional, social and psychological elements. This relates to such experiences as preparing for and passing one's GCSE exams, going to college or university or

finding a job (Coleman, 2011). Thirdly, there are certain milestones that exist as a part of the process, 'structured' around the young people in the study. These include being placed into care, moving into post-16 care-related support, moving into independent living, leaving care, leaving, or reuniting with one's family, being excluded or moved to alternative education as a result of a stressful experience in the mainstream education system.

In reality, of course, these experiences and events are not stand-alone incidents: they take place simultaneously and interact with each other. Experiences at home influence experiences at school, and vice versa; both have an impact on the young person's thoughts and actions, which in turn have a further effect on the young person's interactions with their environment. These dynamic processes can be presented as strands of change within external structures, such as education and care system, family and peer group environments; and internal domains, such as young people's individual characteristics.

This chapter explores the perceived individual change reported by the young people and other strands of events and processes that contributed to this change within a set time frame. Young people's impressions of themselves and their lives at the time of the interview are compared with their reflections on their past. Additionally, their life trajectories within the time frame are analysed, including transitions through the care and education system, dynamic relationships with foster carers, family members and peers. Finally, the chapter explores the often unseen aspect of these often turbulent journeys - emotional meanings that the participants attach to events and processes in their lives.

Young people's perceptions of themselves

Although change occurs over time, a useful way to frame the exploration is to establish the 'before' and 'after' points, and compare one's state at those points. The framed period in question was set up loosely between the time before Aimhigher participation (within approximately two years) and the time of the interview. As all interviews took place after the young person participated in Aimhigher activity, the time of the interview also meant the time after Aimhigher participation. As a part of the exploration of the change, the participants were invited to describe themselves in at least three words retrospectively, at the time before Aimhigher, and, similarly, at the time of the interview. These responses were used as snapshots to frame the period of time in question and as a starting point for understanding the nature of that change.

The words the young people choose to use in response to this question present a rather encouraging image of young people who have become more positive about themselves, their lives and their future. These words are also, interestingly, are mostly personality-related, including descriptions of emotionality, attitude and temperament. As Figure 6:1 demonstrates, the participants see themselves as less "shy", "more confident", "happy", "outgoing". This seems true for both older participants, like 20-year old Arthur, 19-year old Carl and Stephen, 18-year old Amelie, 16-year old Femi, as well as Thomas, Davina, and Lorraine who were fourteen years old. It would be naive, of course, to attribute these changes to Aimhigher alone. Nevertheless, identification of such positive change is significant, in the light of the evidence attesting to poor outcomes for this group (Creegan, 2008; Brodie, 2009; DfE, 2011; Martin and White, 2012).

Figure 6:1 Young people's descriptions of themselves before Aimhigher experience and around the time of interview

Before Aimhigher experience	Around the time of interview
Really quiet and shy, really nervous	More confident, more aware of what I need to do, not sure...
Shy	Changed now... Age difference, still developing. Same but different, now 100% strong
Shy, quiet, scared	Confident, but not overconfident, very happy now
Young	Over-think, [still] self-absorbed, but not by choice. Career-motivated
Slightly deluded, confident, very interested by things, adventurous	Want to be involved more, don't want to be in the corner
Calm, kind, keep myself to myself	Confident, tall, handsome, aware, talented, kind, thoughtful, caring, loud, ball of energy
Funny, clever, mischievous, bored	Focussed, exciting, fun
Emotional	Cheerful, mental, happy, deluded, hyper
Miserable, lonely, fed up	A little more smarter, the road is a bit clearer ahead, a bit more funny
Boisterous, did not know what to expect of myself	Comfortable, developing
Angry	Normal person, not rude, acceptable
Really quiet and shy, really nervous	Outgoing, loud, caring
Shy, quiet, scared of doing new things	Happy, fun
Rude, aggressive, emotional	Happy, confident, still a bit hot-headed, mature, focussed
Hot headed, outspoken, arguments, 'built up'	Definitely more outgoing
Shy, quiet, want to do things and take up new challenges but a bit scared	

It is worth bearing in mind that these changes had taken place over varying periods of time. For example, the participants aged 18-20 took part in Aimhigher activities when they were 14-16 and are reflecting on the last 3-5 years of their lives. In comparison, young people who were 16-18 year old had slightly shorter time scale to go back to; those aged 14-16 were referring to an even shorter period of time. This said, the length of time is not necessarily an indication of how eventful (either in a negative or a positive sense) their lives had been during that time.

A quick glance at the Figure 6:1 reveals that certain words were used more than others; for example, such words as “shy”, “nervous”, “quiet”, “scared” in the retrospective descriptions of self; and “happy” and “confident” for the current perceptions of self. Interestingly, the word “more” was used several times in the descriptions of current self. Clearly there are difficulties associated with the analysis of use of individual words, but it is interesting to consider this data as an element in the overall analysis. These word frequencies become more apparent in the graphic representation of data, as shown in Figures 6:2 and 6:3, where the size of the words increases with the frequency of their use. For example, when the young people reflect on their past selves, the word “shy” is used six times, “quiet” - five times, “scared” - three times and so on. Additionally, the word “really” is used in combination with the words “shy”, “quiet”, “nervous” (Appendix 4 provides further details of word frequencies). In comparison, perceptions of self around the time of interview feature such adjectives as “confident” and “happy” are used four times each, followed by “outgoing”, “focused”, “developing” (further details in Appendix 4).

Again, in this case, the word “more” is used five times, each time next to an adjective such as “confident”, “aware”, “involved”. Despite the fact that this is a relatively small group of participants, the change in the way young people

perceive themselves is evident. Interestingly, a recent study into meanings of young people's descriptions of self (Fagan, Simmons and Nash, 2012) suggests a connection between words such as "happy", "comfortable" and a clear sense of direction with confidence and resilience building, which participants perceived as a journey rather than single events. The authors also highlight the nature of these words as being very much intrinsic, individual-centred and less outward-orientated.

Figure 6:2 Young people's descriptions of past self: infographic representation of word frequencies



Figure 6:3 Young people's descriptions of current self: infographic representation of word frequencies



Alongside this quick snapshot of the participants' perceptions of themselves at two different points, the young people were also asked to score various aspects of their lives, using the same time frame. As the key theme of this study is resilience, these aspects were broken down into several key domains, such as participants' internal characteristics, family-related context and external environments, including school, peer groups and social care support. The participants gave higher scores to most resilience domains around the time of the interview. As shown in Figure 6:4, the only score that is lower compared to the past is the domain of school support: this is mainly due to the answers of the older participants who left school by then and were in HE or FE. Although this may not be necessarily helpful for these young people, this can be explained by a different nature of the way colleges and universities operate in comparison to compulsory education (such as, greater emphasis on the learner independence). This said, other education-related scores (school expectations and attainment) show significant increase. Overall, the highest scored are, in fact, for the internal domains, such as social competence, own expectations of self and self awareness.

Figure 6:4 Average scores of resilience domains (past and present)

Domain	Past	Present	Difference
Attainment	6.4	8.3	1.9
Expectations of school staff	6.9	8.2	1.3
Support from school staff	8	7.8	-0.2
Expectations of family / foster carers	6.3	7.3	1
Support from family / foster carers	7.5	8.3	0.8
Close friendships	7.2	8.3	0.8
New opportunities	6.3	8	1.7
Supportive adult	8.1	8.3	0.2
Social competence	5.4	8.1	2.7
Own expectations of self	5	8.6	3.6
Goals and aspirations	5.7	8.4	2.7
Self-awareness	6.3	8	2.3
Self-efficacy	6	6.1	0.1

Again, although the results in Figure 6:4 present a positive picture, they may be interpreted as yet another snapshot of certain points in young people's lives.

Moreover, these results are the average scores for a small sample of nineteen people. To understand the process in between these points, it is important to explore in detail the way their trajectories were shaped and the supporting or the hindering factors that existed along the way. It is also vital to remember here about the subjectivity of individual perceptions and complex interconnections between internal and external factors. For example, the reason behind a higher score for the new opportunities domain may be due to either presence of more opportunities or one's willingness to engage in them. Environmental factors (including school- and care-related experiences) and family-related factors are discussed in this chapter.

The cumulative impact and meaning of these journeys in combination with the scores is discussed in Chapter 8 in more detail.

Change as a journey

Young people's narratives point to several transitions that make up their journey up to the point of the interview. During the research time frame the nineteen participants made transitions through the education and care system, some - into independent living and some - into adulthood. In addition to the transition through time, they have also moved, geographically.

The majority of participants of the study had to move home - namely, fourteen out of nineteen participants speak about moving house at least once. Out of the fourteen, thirteen young people have had care experience. Most of the thirteen report moving several times. This is not a surprising finding as frequent movement and associated challenges is a well documented feature of the lives of looked after children and young people (Social Work Inspection Agency, 2006;

Brodie, 2009). The reasons for moving are varied: moving when taken into care and at a point of reuniting with a family or family member; moving from children's home to a foster placement and vice versa; moving between foster placements. Some young people also had to move with foster carers or between family homes.

Five young people who did not come from a care background (Femi, Lee, Davina, Tony and Lorraine) had their own share of instability and movement: Femi moved from a mainstream school to a PRU (following the death of a close family member) and then back (at the time of the interview he was back at his mainstream school). Lee, Davina, Tony and Lorraine went through what they reported as a stressful transition from mainstream into alternative education. Disruption is, therefore, a key element in the lives of all members of the sample. These examples also serve to demonstrate the fine line that exists between young people in care and a wider group of young people who are socially and educationally vulnerable (Boddy et al., 2009).

The stress associated with moving house is well known, involving other disruptions such as separation from the established support networks and having to create new ones. This includes losing friendships and getting out of touch with other important people in a child's life; it also often involves changing schools. Moving therefore does not constitute one factor, but rather, a multitude of factors that are linked to the physical event of moving. Arthur (whose story echoes others' accounts) reflects on his reactions when his foster carers decided to move house - he was very opposed to this change as he was very keen to keep his group of friends. Arthur chose to commute across the county for nine months in order to stay in the same school, with his friends:

“I was comfortable where I was living, and that had a big impact, how happy I was. And then when we moved I made a big fuss about it. I was so comfortable; I did not want to give it up”.

Transitions through care

Instability and movement are often an inseparable part of being a looked after child. Care is not a fixed, permanent status and those who enter care as adolescents may have experienced prior episodes of care (DfE, 2011). For many, the instability continues, whilst in care: changing foster placements, changing social workers, moving schools, losing friends, having to “fit in”, leaving care - a combination of these factors have been experienced by the young people in the study.

As this was not a part of the investigation, no questions were asked about going into care. However, there is one story, told by Zamir’s carer. It is relevant here as it highlights how a wrong decision made by the services can affect a young person for years to come. At the point of being placed into care Zamir’s age was wrongly assessed, which resulted in him joining a group of younger children in primary school. However, when this mistake was discovered, and the young person was transferred into his age group, he suddenly found himself in Year 9 instead of Year 6. Needless to say, the impact of these events on Zamir’s confidence was devastating. Age assessment on entry is a problematic issue for asylum seeking children. Apart from the effect this error has had on Zamir’s academic development and psychological wellbeing, it determines his eligibility for support as well as the agency that’s responsible for providing this support (Mitchell, 2003). Despite a heated political debate around this issue, there is evidence that age assessment practices vary greatly from LA to LA due to a number of constraints, which has an impact on the way these children’s needs are met (Kvittingen, 2010).

Figure 6:5 Details of young people's transitions through care

Name and age of participant	Place of residence at time of interview	No of moves of place of residence (within the set time frame)	Experience of Children's home	Number of known foster care placements
Carl , 19	Independent	At least 3 (children's home - foster care - independent)	Yes	At least one
Arthur, 20	Independent	At least twice – with foster carers; into independence	Not reported	At least one
Stephen, 20	Independent	Not reported	Not reported	At least one
Amelie, 18	Independent	At least three (children's home - foster care – independent)	Yes	At least one
Alexandra, 16	Foster placement	Not reported	Not reported	At least one (long-term)
Jodie, 17	Foster placement	Not reported	Not reported	At least one (long-term)
Ajaz, 15	Foster placement	Not reported	Not reported	At least one
Claire, 18	Independent	Multiple times (into kinship care; back to home town – “at the time I living everywhere” – independent living)	Not reported	At least one
Anita, 17	Independent	Multiple moves between foster care placements and in independent living	Not reported	Many
Rowena, 18	Family	At least three (two foster placements; family)	Not reported	At least two
Saleem, 18	Independent	Came to the UK at 14; Foster placement; independent)	Not reported	At least one
Stephanie, 20	Independent	At least two (foster placement and independent)	Not reported	At least one (long-term)

Figure 6:5 (continued) Details of young people's transitions through care

Name and age of participant	Place of residence at time of interview	No of moves of place of residence (within the set time frame)	Experience of Children's home	Number of known foster care placements
Thomas, 15	Foster placement	At least once (foster care)	Not reported	At least one
Lee, 15	Family	At least once	N/a	N/a
Zamir, 16	Foster care	Came to the UK at a young age; Foster placement	Not reported	At least one

Although the topic of going into care did not feature in the stories of other young people, they spoke at length about leaving care, support (or lack thereof) they received from social services, relationship with foster carers and the way being looked after makes them feel. Moving between care placements is a prominent factor in many accounts. For example, Rowena, Claire and Anita - all care leavers - had to move to a different city in their early teens. This resulted in gaps in education, losing vital connections and support network; all this caused a lot of stress to the girls and affected their attainment as well as emotional wellbeing. Anita talks about the feeling of restlessness that followed her everywhere she moved. The girls talk about the sense of relief and being settled down when they are able to come back to their home town.

For every care leaver, moving is a part of going into independent living. Going to live on your own at the age of sixteen is hard for any teenager and is associated with poor outcomes (Stein, 2004; 2005). As detailed in Figure 6:5, eight out of the thirteen participants had moved out of foster care and were living independently at the time of the interview. All of the eight - Carl, Arthur, Stephen, Amelie, Claire, Anita, Saleem and Stephanie - started living on their own once they turned sixteen. Most young people found it stressful - even those

whose experience of children's homes and foster care were not necessarily positive (Carl, Anita, Claire, Rowena). Carl, Arthur and Amelie admit to having no independent skills at the point of moving out into their own accommodation. Lack of preparation for such a big step is not the only issue around leaving care. Research into leaving care highlights financial worries and decreased level of support from social services (both practical and emotional) at the time when it is most needed are the other two key features for care leavers (Harris, 2009). For example, Arthur had to work at a factory in order to support himself financially; he found it very difficult at the time - although it also gave him financial freedom. Anita remembers having no contact with her social worker for weeks when she turned sixteen and moved to another place to go to college.

Despite these difficulties, at the point of the interview all of them seemed settled and relatively happy about living on their own. In particular, the young people appreciate the freedom that it provides - being able to "do whatever you want", "go wherever you want" and "have your own key". Also, for some of them, independent living was actually a step towards stability, for example, Claire: having moved back from another town, she was "was living everywhere" until social services moved her into her own place. Another young person living independently at the time of the interview is eighteen-year-old Saleem, who moved to the UK on his own at the age of 14 and has lived in the local town for a year. In what seemed to be a composed, relaxed manner, Saleem reflects on his journey:

"Life was ok actually... Sometimes difficult... No family here... Alone in the house... ".

Saleem is brief with words; reasons for this 'thinness' of his narrative may be many. It has been documented that the way refugee and asylum seeking children

tell their life story will vary depending on the circumstances and the audience; it can also be a part of coping strategy (Kohli, 2006). Saleem stated that he liked the town and was hoping to stay there - he had plans to go to college and find a job. Although Saleem's legal status was not clarified, it is very possible that his fate was being decided at that time - and that there was another long journey ahead of him. The uncertainties that surround the lives of young people who come to the UK in the search of asylum are well documented: they do not stop beyond acquiring citizenship and present and present a great "test of resilience" for many (Kohli, 2001).

Two groups of people play a key role in supporting young people's transition through care: social workers and foster carers. Relationships with carers in particular have been identified in research as highly significant in terms of young people's overall outcomes (Martin and Jackson, 2002; DfE, 2011). With regards to their relationships with the care professionals, young people's stories vary.

As detailed in Figure 6:5, all of the fourteen young people from care background had been placed in foster care at least for a short period of time. For some of them, foster care provided a stable, supportive environment that helped them grow and develop. For others, however, their journey through care has been interrupted by frequent moves from one placement to another. Three girls in the group, Alexandra, Stephanie and Jodie had the same foster placement and speak very positively about their foster carers. All three named their foster carers when asked to name a supportive adult in their lives. Jodie admits that her progressing on to college is

"...Down to the fact that my foster parents pushed me. If it wasn't for them I don't know where I'd be..."

Similarly, Stephanie's foster carers "taught me right from wrong"; Alexandra describes her foster carer as "really supportive... and it helps". These accounts reinforce the importance of secure and nurturing role that the foster carers play in young people's lives (Furnivall, 2011). It is not known whether these relationships carried on post-research or post-care. Positive relationships with foster carers can bring stability into a chaotic life of a looked after child: both Amelie and Carl found themselves much more settled once they left Children's home and moved into foster care. Amelie found her foster carers

"...Protective and more direct. It made me more stable, a family environment; they showed me what's right and wrong".

Likewise, Arthur and Stephen described their carers as "supportive" and "encouraging", which, as they recall, had a positive impact on their self-belief and their progress at school.

However, not all young people could say the same about their placement experiences. Rowena and Claire recall their foster carers being "strict"; this may have helped them get through school, but failed to support the girls in other ways:

"It wasn't really support... It was more like, you really need to do your homework now... Wasn't anything major".

(Rowena)

"My foster parents were really strict...I was not allowed to do anything, like, socialising...I only had a friend over once from school...They never... If you are not happy in all areas you don't... so academically yes, but socially no..."

(Claire)

What comes through, therefore, is that there is no single one perception of change, or indeed, of care. These stories also highlight further the complex role that foster carers play in the young people's lives. Apart from stability and secure base, young people also need to experience friendship and a sense of belonging (Howe et al., 1999; Sinclair, 2005). It is clear from Rowena's and Claire's interviews that supporting young people emotionally is not always a part of providing a nurturing family-like environment for looked after children.

Lack of emotional support was not the only difficulty in Claire's life. Claire had multiple moves in a time span of several years; as a part of these movements, she was placed in kinship care in a different town, had a six month break from education and lost contact with her friends:

"It felt like they dumped me... I lost contact with everybody. Stuck in my own little world, didn't have anyone encouraging me... doing nothing every day. People around me would be doing the same... I felt like I could not get anywhere, stuff like this is forever now"

A turning point for Claire was being able to move back to the town she grew up in. However, it took some time for to be able to settle down.

Similarly, Anita moved into independent living at sixteen; this followed a multitude of moves from placement to placement, none of which brought about positive experiences. She found living with foster carers restrictive, this made her feel like she was just a "foster child". A high achiever, praised at school, she found no support at foster placements and felt alienated in that environment:

"Foster family where you can speak better than a lot of the other kids there, it's almost illusion... You think: if this is my world... this is the world you are currently in".

Anita's stressful experience highlights the responsibility of the corporate parent to provide children and young people with secure and stable environments. This stability should not only refer to the physical aspects of being looked after - it should, very importantly, also include psychological and emotional support. Recent research points to difficulties around finding an appropriate placement for foster children; shortage of placements often results in mismatched provision, which causes more instability and further movement (Norgate et al., 2012) At the same time, evidence suggests that foster carers do not feel supported by the services in their efforts to provide best care for the children (DfE, 2009).

Social workers are a key point of contact from initial assessments to finding placements, from regular advice and guidance to leaving care and beyond. Some of the participants were very positive about their social workers and the support they provide – interesting given that research has found social workers to be less important to young people than carers or teachers (see, for example, Harker et al, 2004). Amelie, Stephen and Stephanie refer to the positive supportive relationship they had with their social worker when they moved into the Sixteen Plus care provision. For other young people, however, this was not the case. Rowena and Anita did not see much support from their social workers:

“When I left to go to college, I didn't see my social worker for weeks... I was very isolated”

(Anita)

“My social workers weren't really interested”

(Rowena)

Similarly, Claire felt “dumped” by the social services when she was moved into kinship care; she recalls not having any contact for months.

These less positive reflections on the quality of social care do not match the views of the two social services professionals interviewed for this study. Both John and Sarah demonstrate broad understanding of young people’s needs and the commitment to meeting them. John’s view is also that the young people have a support network of professionals around them, including social workers and Connexions. Both Sarah and John were instrumental in referring young people for Aimhigher interventions; they also observed and attended several activities. There is, however, clearly a variation in the level and quality of support available to young people in and after care. The accounts of Sarah and John may, therefore, illustrate the fact that appropriate support is possible, but is not always provided on a consistent basis.

While it is not always possible to know the reasons for each particular case, there is some strong evidence that recent public cuts have had a dramatic impact on the work of social services, and therefore, provision for vulnerable groups. According to a recent report published by The British Association of Social Workers and Social Workers Union (2012), social workers face (and have been facing for a while) unrealistic pressures due to a combination of the increasing administrative and case load for the social workers as a result of public cuts and ever-high numbers of young people being placed in public care.

The recent changes in the social services landscape are affecting further the already scarce developmental opportunities that are available to looked after children and care leavers. As Sarah (VSH) points out,

“These young people have limited experiences, especially the LAC kids... They need every chance they can get... ”.

Sarah’s words reflect the messages in policy, that stress the importance of helping children in care to “reach their potential”, “develop their talents and skills”, which will enhance their transition into adulthood (DfES, 2007, p.5). However, as the stories of the research participants demonstrate, their reality is too often one of “truncated opportunities” (Creegan, 2008, p.1), which seem to continue the pattern of deprivation and disadvantage.

Transitions through education

For any young person, educated in or outside the mainstream setting, schooling represents a major part of their life, impacting on their skills development as well as set of values, identity and self-image in terms of success and failure. For young people who come from care and alternative education background the prospects of going on to HE or having a successful careers are bleaker than for other young people who did not suffer similar setbacks (Soan, 2010). On ground level, the issues for practitioners can be summarised in the words of Sarah, a social services professional:

“Exams and attendance for looked after children, that’s our whole focus”.

Indeed, exams and attendance are vital components of succeeding academically; however, it is important to understand the factors that promote, or inhibit achievement in vulnerable young people.

At the time of the interview the vast majority of the young people were in education, or planning to go on to the next stage of their learning journey. Four of the nineteen participants were in HE (Stephanie, Arthur, Stephen and Carl). Five young people were in FE: Amelie, Alexandra and Jodie were doing a course

at college; so were Anita and Rowena (they were also in a process of applying for a place at university). Claire was in the process of applying for a university course after having finished her qualifications in an alternative education placement. Proportionately, this number is greater than that found in the general population of looked after children, with official statistics indicating that at the time of writing around 7 per cent of these young people go on to HE (DfE, 2012).

Eight young people were either in compulsory education. Three of them (Femi, Ajaz and Zamir) were in a mainstream school. Femi was back at his school after spending some time in a PRU; he was speaking about going to college and applying to university when he is older. Thomas, Davina, Lee, Tony and Lorraine are working towards their GCSEs in AP. In fact, Saleem was the only young person in the group who did not have anything confirmed at that point; he was hoping to get into college if he is granted the right to remain in the UK.

Overall, this looks like a picture of young people making successful transitions through the education system. Indeed, this is a very positive finding. However, it is equally, if not more important to acknowledge their journey up to this point. Alongside movements in time and space the young people's trajectories through education were of somewhat disjointed, often 'zigzagged' nature. This makes their success in managing such transitions even more striking. Transition through education is ridden with difficulties for many children and young people who come from care background. Low rates of achievement and progression for this group are well documented; the reasons are multiple and complex, including family breakdown, blocked access to opportunities and social mobility and insufficient provision of statutory support (Berridge, 2007; Brodie, 2009).

Similarly, for those who end up excluded or moved out of a mainstream school, interaction with the school environment is full of challenges and

disappointments. Their experiences featured gaps in education caused by movement or unsupported transition; lack of understanding of their needs and therefore lack of professional support; lack of emotional support in the times most difficult. Getting “kicked out” or having to be “removed” is a stand-alone event that usually follows a chain of stressful events (Brodie, 2001). It also leads to other, often no less stressful experiences, such as getting used to new environment and peer group, catching up with education after a gap in provision and continuing to deal with the stigma of not being “normal” (Brown, 2007; Kendall et al., 2007; Young Minds, 2010).

As detailed in Figure 6:6, ten young people in the sample had to move, or to be moved from one school to another; three of them (Amelie, Femi and Lee) were at some point excluded from school. For Femi and Amelie, the exclusion followed death of a close family member. Amelie remembers how she was “angry with the whole world” when she was “kicked out of school”.

Figure 6:6 Details of young people's movements through the education system

Name and age of participant	Education at time of interview	Special needs	History of exclusion or movement to a special school	History of gaps in education or moving schools	Number of moves between schools (including exclusion and reintegration)
Carl , 19	University	not reported	not reported	Gaps in education	Not reported
Arthur, 20	University	not reported	not reported	moving schools	At least once
Stephen, 20	University	Young person suspects dyslexia	not reported	not reported	Not reported
Amelie, 18	College	not reported	exclusion	both	At least twice (exclusion; movement within alternative provision)
Alexandra, 16	College	not reported	not reported	not reported	Not reported
Jodie, 17	College	not reported	not reported	not reported	Not reported
Ajaz, 15	Mainstream school	not reported	not reported	not reported	Not reported
Femi, 16	Mainstream school	not reported	exclusion	not reported	At least twice (exclusion and reintegration)
Claire, 18	Applying to university	not reported	not reported	Both including a gap of six months	At least twice (geographical move; alternative education)
Anita, 17	College; applying to university	EBD	EBD school	Both	At least three times (alternative education; two colleges)

Figure 6:6 (continued) Details of young people's movements through the education system

Name and age of participant	Education at time of interview	Special needs	History of exclusion or movement to a special school	History of gaps in education or moving schools	Number of moves between schools (including exclusion and reintegration)
Rowena, 18	College; applying to HE	not known	not reported	Both including a gap around 18 months	At least twice (mainstream school)
Saleem, 18	Looking for work, applying to college	not known	not reported	Gaps in education	Not reported
Stephanie, 20	University	not known	not reported	not reported	Not reported
Thomas, 15	Alternative education unit	EBD	both	both	At least once (moved into alternative education)
Lee, 15	Alternative education unit	EBD	both	both	Multiple moves (including at least mainstream schools, a PRU and EBD school)
Davina, 14	Alternative education unit	Asperger Syndrome	EBD school	moving schools	At least one (into EBD school)
Tony, 15	Alternative education unit	Autistic spectrum	EBD school	moving schools	At least one (into EBD school)
Lorraine, 14	Alternative education unit	EBD	EBD school	moving schools	At least one (into EBD school)
Zamir, 16	Mainstream school	Not known	Not reported	Gap in of three years (school age wrongly assessed)	In a special unit at a mainstream school

Six young people in the sample did not only have to move schools, but also had gaps in education, which set them back and made it harder to catch up with the curriculum. There is some evidence that looked after young people continue to experience extended periods of absence from school, which almost inevitably has negative effects on their education (Brodie and Morris, 2009). Rowena and Claire, were out of education for lengthy periods of time, both around the GCSE exam period. For both girls these disruptions happened as a consequence of their movement through the care system. Events like this cause emotional distress and put pressure on the young people, particularly if it happens around a major milestone, such as transition between secondary education and high school. Rowena, who had been a high achiever, describes how moving disrupted her education and affected her grades, which “was meant to be a lot higher” and “not as good as [they] could have been” if she had not missed around eighteen months of education:

“I left school... I did one week of Year 10 and then left school, and didn’t do any of Year 10, and then I joined Year 11 at a different school. I had about four months in Year 11. I pretty much did it all at home”

Claire had to move in and out of care, which resulted in her moving to a different part of the country in order to be able to stay with family members for a period of time:

“I started my Year 9 in [local school]... Then moved to [another part of the country] for two years, and finished school there. Then came back, and for six months had nothing”.

Another example is Zamir, whose attainment was affected dramatically by a ‘gap’ in education through no fault of his own. His development and exam preparation was severely affected by a wrong assessment of his age at the time when he had been placed into care (Kvittingen, 2010). This error meant that the young person had to eventually catch up on over two years’ of education, which affected not

only his attainment, but, vitally, his confidence and self-esteem. At the time of the interview he was getting support from a special support unit, set up within a school and seemed to be developing rapport with a member of staff in the unit. As it also turned out, this member of staff was not for a long time made aware of the circumstances surrounding his underachievement and behaviour. Information like this can be instrumental in setting up appropriate support for a young person; Zamir's story highlights the lack, and the importance of information sharing and mutual awareness between key staff involved in a young person's life.

Similarly, for several young people who found themselves placed outside mainstream education, the education-related journey is far from easy. Lee, a young person attending an alternative school, had to move schools several times before his needs were suitably accommodated. At the time of the interview, he had already been with that school for "about a year".

Although Lee liked the new school and, after "doing Wednesdays to begin with", he settled in the new setting and made new friends, it has not been an easy transition:

"I found it very challenging... If you move from one school to another, you've lost all your mates and you've got to make new friends... I find it hard".

While moving often had negative effects, there were also examples of change being positive and acting as a protective factor. This was the case for Arthur, who admits that he received a much better education at his new school, although he was not happy when his foster carers decided to move house:

"Everything else in my life was changing and I wanted to keep one thing

the same... [But] the atmosphere for learning was much better; it did not disrupt classes as much, so you could learn. That definitely picked up my grades...”

Arthur recalls that he received more support and attention from the staff at the new school, which made a difference to his attainment and, eventually, post-school options. Sadly, this example is far from representative for other the young people in the study. Support of the school staff and high expectations can play an important role in the young person’s academic development, particularly, if there is no other source of such kind of recognition and belief in their ability. One of the threads running through the research data is around the low expectations held by school staff, particularly, for looked after children. Recalling her school experience, Anita offers a lonely account of not being supported and seems to be blaming herself for that, at least partly:

“...no, they did not really [provide me with support] when actually I probably needed it... nothing, I got nothing”.

(Anita)

Appropriately high expectations from professionals can play an important role in boosting young people’s motivation and self-esteem (Goldstein and Brooks, 2013). Low expectations may dampen one’s confidence and prevent them from reaching their full potential; at the same time, exceedingly high expectations together with lack of overall support may result in too much pressure for the young person. Young people provided varied accounts of others’ expectations and tensions they experience about it:

“I was very frustrated... Why didn’t they tell me these opportunities, why did I have to find out for myself? Why did they aim so low for the school? And then when I spoke about it, it was like, you are delusional... I sat at

meetings where kids were saying they want to be footballers, and it was like, who's gonna take you? "

(Anita)

The accounts of other young people in the sample echo Anita's reflections on lack of opportunities available to vulnerable young people through the channels of education provision. The majority in the sample found it difficult to recall anything developmental that was offered to them at the school. For example, Lorraine could not remember taking part in any opportunities before the Aimhigher arts project:

"Before the opportunities to take photos – not much".

Moreover, when something was available, some of them weren't able to participate due to other complications that were going on in their lives. Rowena, who missed eighteen months of school as a result of foster care placements, could not take part in school trips as she was catching up on her studies:

"I was so behind with my work, I didn't really have time to do anything... There were a couple of trips... They were great opportunities... But I was too behind so... "

In fact, Ajaz was the only person in the sample who spoke about how excited he was when he was chosen by his school to go on a sailing trip - this happened a month before he went on an Aimhigher residential. Ajaz named this sailing trip as the most important event in his life at that time. However, this is just one positive example out of nineteen young people who could not think of any opportunities available at their school.

Sadly, for many this trend continues once they leave compulsory education and move on to college or university. Stephanie, a care leaver who was in her second year of university at the time of the interview, states that "there are not too

many opportunities here... There's been only two" since she enrolled on the course. Those young people who had something to say when asked about opportunities, spoke mainly of their engagement in various activities outside school. Zamir played football after school; Arthur, Stephen and Stephanie were a part of the Cadets force - they found it a very positive experience, which helped them develop new skills. Lack of educational and wider developmental opportunities for looked after children and children placed outside mainstream education has been well documented (Scottish Executive, 2007; Martin and White, 2012). Despite repeated messages about the importance of these opportunities to the young people who already face multiple disadvantage, the participants' accounts clearly state that much more work can, and should be done in this area.

Alongside this lack of opportunities, low aspirations and insufficient support, mismatched academic provision is another frequent feature of vulnerable young people's lives. For example, Amelie was advised to apply for a place in AP; when she got there, she

"...Didn't like it, it was more for naughty kids. Everyone there just distracts you so I could not get on with my work".

This is a common complaint amongst young people attending alternative provision, and the situation may be especially difficult for girls (Osler, 2002). Amelie's example illustrates how a lack of understanding of a young person's needs can lead to a wrong decision about her education placement, thus affecting her outcomes further. At that point in time, a distressing situation at home was affecting Amelie's behaviour, which resulted in exclusion. Placing Amelie together with the students whose needs seemed more complex presented a potential risk to her attainment. This situation could also link to the low aspirations that, according to the young people, some professionals had of their potential.

Situations like this highlight a great need for a holistic understanding of young people's needs. As Lever (2011) points out, what is often considered as challenging behaviour and inappropriate conduct is, in fact, a sign of the learner's unmet needs and their attempts to make the most of the situation. Behaviours such as bullying, non-compliance, truancy and other actions often mask a multitude of needs, including learning difficulties, emotional trauma and attachment disorders. This is reflected in the stories of the younger participants of the study (Thomas, Tony, Davina, Lee and Lorraine), who were attending a school for students with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Thomas recalls that how he was constantly under pressure from a family member; he "had bad temper then - had to be restrained"; Lorraine "was a bully" and "bullied others", Davina "got battered every day". In contrast, they found the staff in the alternative education unit supportive and encouraging; all five speak of the positive effect the school had on them.

Transitions through relationships

Relationships and friendships play an integral part in young people's transitions through adolescence; their role is even more important for vulnerable young people who move through care and alternative education. These networks can be an invaluable source of support, encouragement and strength for the young person's development; moreover, they can provide the necessary environment for learning, new skills and role modelling (Howe et al., 1999). Equally, these groups and environments can act as a stress factor, if they function in a way that inhibits the child's emotional wellbeing and development of own identity. Within the realms of Aimhigher and educational aspirations in general, peers and family are recognised as significant forces that impact on young people's academic ambitions. This is supported by the feedback sheets in the 'satellite' content,

where most young people wrote “parents or carers” followed by “friends” as key influencers with regards to their academic choices.

Young people’s relationship with the family members differs greatly across the sample; one of the obvious reasons being that the majority of the sample come from care background and a high proportion likely to have experienced different kinds of abuse and neglect (Department for Education, 2011). Contact with birth parents is a complex issue for both looked after children and their parents, and presents significant challenges for carers (Schofield et al., 2011); these connections may be very positive, as well as very traumatic. For example, Alexandra recalls the “rough time last year”, when she tried to get in touch with her mother - this had a severe impact on her concentration at school, and, ultimately, her grades. Another example is Zamir, who was very upset at the time of the interview as his mother had unexpectedly made contact the day before (he was very excited about the interview a week before the incident).¹ This left him, in the words of his carer, very “stressed” and “depressed”. Likewise, Alexandra recalls how speaking to her birth family affected her motivation and concentration at school during exams:

“I went through quite a rough time last year, with family and my mum... I really wasn’t happy, I could not do well with my exams, I’ve done a few questions and left the whole thing.... “

Zamir’s and Alexandra’s examples draw attention to the powerful impact this re-emerging relationship had on their wellbeing. Poems and creative writing in the ‘satellite’ context supports this view: many young people express their bitterness and disappointment with regards to disfunctionality of their families. There are, however, positive accounts of contact with birth family for looked after young

¹ The researcher asked Zamir several times (at the start and during the interview) whether he still wants to be interviewed. Zamir responded affirmatively but asked for a member of staff he trusted to be present with him during the interview (she was present throughout the interview).

people: for example, Carl refers to “talking to mum again” as one of the recent key (and positive) events in his life.

Appropriately matched foster care placements can provide an environment akin to a family one. As mentioned earlier, five young people in the group reported positive relationships with their long-term foster carers. The carers of Arthur, Stephen, Jodie and Alexandra were encouraging and supportive; whereas Amelie appreciated the boundaries and the directness of her carer (in comparison to a Children’s home setting). Reasonable boundaries are important for the young person’s development, including sense of responsibility and appropriate behaviour (Fuller, 2000). For example, Stephanie’s carers “taught her right from wrong”. However, very strict boundaries accompanied by lack of warmth and emotional support are much less helpful. Rowena’s and Claire’s memories of their foster care are ones of strictness and discipline, but total lack of understanding and emotional support.

For Rowena, this may have helped her achieve academically but did not fulfil her other needs as a young person. She also recalls her birth family as being “pushy” about her education, which she found pressurising. Although she seemed to be doing well academically despite a long gap in education (at the time of interview she was in college, going to university), she admitted that she finds high expectations too stressful. What may have also contributed to her academic record is the fact that she wanted to follow in her sisters’ footsteps. She attributes her desire to go into HE to her early childhood experiences:

“I’ve always wanted it, since I was young, because my older sister has been to uni; one of them is a university researcher. She’d always bring [work] home ... I always found it interesting”

Rowena is not the only one who speaks about relationships with siblings. For looked after children, brothers and sisters, as well as grandparents or other family members (aside from parents) can play a significant part in developing attachment (Furnivall, 2011). For example, Stephanie mentions her brother as a significant person in her life; Stephen also speaks about his brother always being there for him; for Claire, her sister “has been there” for her. Similarly, Amelie is in regular contact with her brother, especially now that she’s older:

“My brother rings me at least once a week. He’ll just check how I am going; if it gets too much to let him know”.

Amelie also speaks very fondly of her grandmother as a significant person in her life. In fact, this is true for other young people in the sample, (who are not in care). For both Lee and Tony, their grandmother played an important role; both boys mention her as a significant adult in their lives:

“My nan... If I had any problems, I would say to her what it is... If she said something I’d take it and try to do what she is saying”

(Lee)

“My grandma had a lot of influence on me... She’s gone. Yes she was [supportive]. Even when I was in absolute rage she still knew how to calm me down... She had a really good influence on me”

(Tony)

Tony and Lee are two of the five participants that do not come from care background and live with their families. Their stories about their family relations vary. Lee does not talk about his family much, apart from his grandmother; other four young people in alternative education provide rather positive accounts of their parents. Tony recalls how, even during the most difficult time of his life his father “saw a lot more in me than my mum did”. Lorraine, Femi and Davina had their parents and other family members supporting and encouraging them

throughout their journeys. Davina recalls how her family “have always been trying to support me” through very traumatic experiences in mainstream education; similarly, Lorraine’s parents “were getting [her] out of depression”. Femi reports having on-going support from extended family when a close family member passed away.

Apart from family support, friendships and peer groups play an important role in young people’s lives; in fact, they may acquire greater significance as the child enters adolescence (Fuller, 2000). There is evidence that positive friendships with peers can improve young people’s transitions into adulthood, acting as a strong protective factor (Stein, 2005). For example, Amelie, Carl, Zamir and Saleem made good friends during the Aimhigher residential; they were still keeping in touch with them at the time of the interview. Stephanie is still in touch with her “adventurous and outgoing” friends from college, who had a big impact on her own sense of adventure. Lorraine speaks of someone who she has been friends with since she was six years old; they are still in touch. Lee is still in touch with a boy he met in a mainstream school; now in alternative education, he still does his best to keep in touch:

“He’s like the biggest friend... through all the changes that I went through at school...”

Having a close supportive friend is a strong protective factor for the young person; equally, losing a good friend is a potential threat and yet another contributing factor to the instability that surrounds the lives of many vulnerable young people. It is worth bearing in mind, however, that friendships and peer groups can also act as a risk factor: in this case, separating oneself from this group, as hard as it can be, may be a better option. Amelie and Carl both report leaving “a bad crowd” behind when they moved their care placement. Similarly, Femi tells a story of being excluded after getting into trouble with his peers (this was around the time a close family member passed away):

“I’d get into trouble just because of peer pressure and people around me... Make sure you choose the right friends...”

Having grown up, Femi can reflect on what happened in the past and develop better understanding of his environment:

“...There are certain types of friends... Basically you have to know someone. There are certain things you have to know about someone.... for you to feel comfortable around them”

On balance, eighteen out of nineteen young people had at least one friend they spoke very positively about; the exception is Anita, a care leaver whose journey has been filled with frequent moves, multiple foster placements and a feeling of loneliness:

“... When I was younger I was always looking forward, I always wanted like a meaningful friendship, to meet someone...”

Sadly, the situation does not seem to have changed for Anita: she didn’t have any friends at the time of the interview either. In fact, she could not think of anybody who had constant presence in her life, apart from one professional, who did a lot for her at the time of difficulty:

“If I knew the answer.... I’d love to have friends, it’s one of my of my dreams.... to have friends”

Anita’s emotional account presents a stark illustration of the emotional pain that some vulnerable young people are going through and the questions they ask themselves, trying to understand the reasons behind their troubles. The feeling of rejection, lack of love and care among looked after children has been well documented (Giushard-Pine, McCall and Hamilton, 2007). However, young people with complex needs that are raised within family environment are not exempt from these feelings; the next part of this chapter focuses on the young people’s emotional journeys.

Emotional journeys

Instability, uncertainty and traumatic experiences cannot but impact on the young people's emotional and mental wellbeing. In this study, young people speak of being deeply affected by events in their lives; this is supported by the accounts of interviewed professionals and the 'satellite' context. As described at the beginning of this chapter (Figures 6:1 and 6:2), "quiet" and "shy" are not the only adjectives the participants used to describe themselves in the past; they also used the words "angry", "emotional", "scared", "lonely", "aggressive", "fed up". In the creative writing data (the satellite context) young people speak about "pain", "hatred" and "broken heart".

Samantha describes the everyday environments of many young people in her school:

"... Single parent families that weren't working, anger issues, bullying issues, trouble with the police, everything you can think of... Thrown out of home... In a lot of trouble... The people [they] associate with..."

Anne adds another perspective to the hardships these young people have to deal with:

"... They've come from a point of real low self esteem, or maybe having been put down, or branded as silly or stupid or naughty... They've lived so long with whatever – negativity from school, teachers, parents.. It's so ingrained unfortunately..."

Indeed, the issues around vast deprivation and disadvantage surrounding vulnerable young people is a common thread in research and policy (Creegan, 2009; Barnes, Green and Ross, 2011). Becky, who also teaches in a special school, sums up the effect that these experiences have on a child:

"They have these ideas that they are not as good as other people".

Indeed, for young people in care and educated outside of the mainstream education system, the feeling of being different is a rather frequent occurrence. They are acutely aware of their own circumstances, which shapes their view of the rest of the world, and their place within it. Tony, who has complex needs and had been attending a special school for four years by the time of the interview, uses the term "normal" with regards to his peers in mainstream education. He had to spend some time in between two schools, before a decision was made that he will continue his education in an alternative centre. He reflects with sadness on his parents' reaction as well as his own view of himself:

"Well I am now here, so not being in a "normal" school kicked them up a bit. Cause they always thought my brother would do badly... when it's actually the other way around... It had a bad effect on people... I was trying to get back into mainstream [education] so I was sort of jogging between the two... it just didn't work out..."

While Tony doesn't go into much detail of what exactly happened in the mainstream school and has mixed feelings about leaving it behind, Lorraine, another student in AP, provides a very sharp portrait of her own experience in her previous (mainstream) school:

"I was not happy at school before. I used to be a bully and bullied [others], used to take it out on other people... I hated myself".

This honest account from a fourteen year old demonstrates the complexity of one's interactions with an environment such as school: an array of stress factors

and complex needs could be masked by various behaviours, from being bullied to bullying others.

Looked after children are not exempt from similar circumstances. In fact, as it was established earlier in the thesis, as a group they are nine times more likely to have special needs (DCSF, 2010). Anita, who has been moving foster placements, and also attended a school for young people with special needs, makes a clear distinction between her world in care and the world of others:

“I haven’t met a lot of normal people... if I said, I grew up in care, they’d be like: shock, horror, wow! You can’t really share these things... And then you can’t be yourself because you can’t share these things”.

Problems around stigma and labelling that vulnerable young people face at school can be very isolating and thus exacerbates the stress factors in their life. A report by a charity “Young Minds” titled *See beyond our labels* highlights the importance of breaking down the stereotypes associated with having mental health issues, (Young Minds, 2010). Being labelled, stigmatised and judged can lead to low self esteem, feeling ashamed and worthless. Another serious implication of this phenomenon is fear of being judged, and, as a result of it, not seeking help and accessing the services by those affected.

A study conducted by Rose et al. (2007) identified 250 labels used in language in relation to mental health conditions; only 4 per cent of these labels were positive – the overwhelming majority were, however, negative, stigmatising words. The *See beyond our labels* report (Young Minds, 2010) states that around 50 per cent of all young people use stereotypes and negative stigmatising language towards their peers who are going through challenging times. Anita’s view is a good illustration of what vulnerable young people may be facing at school:

“...They don’t know, they make up negative assumptions, chucking labels at you, “attention seeker” ... When I am just talking about my normal day, not getting attention”

Low self-esteem and feeling alienated are not all the negative outcomes of being stigmatised. Vulnerable young people can also start blaming themselves. For example, Tony thinks it may be his fault that he has not got many friends:

“People don’t see a lot in me and don’t have to be friends... well they just normally don’t get involved in my life... to be bothered to get involved in my problems”.

Stephen, a young person who left care by the time of the interview, does not have special needs, but feels that being in care can be stigmatising enough. He feels conscious of being in care, and of how people can be judging him and other looked after young people:

“People say it’s their fault. If a child goes into the care system, 100 per cent it’s not their fault, no matter what they’ve done. For whatever action or thing they lashed out on, they want help with some area that they dislike, whatever it is”.

This insightful view from Stephen does not only highlight the key protective role that social workers and foster carers (or family) can play in a vulnerable child’s life, but also the importance of recognising “a cry for help” expressed in challenging behaviour (Giushard-Pine, McCall and Hamilton, 2007). The views of fifty young people in care, voiced in a recent report by Young Minds (2012) echo Stephen’s opinion: most looked after children do not feel comfortable talking to school staff about their feelings, worries and fears. Fear of being judged and stigmatised can prevent a young person in trouble from seeking help:

“No, they did not really [provide me with support] when actually I probably needed it. But the impression I gave them was that I don’t need the support”.

(Anita)

As looked after children tell Young Minds (2012), one of the main reasons for this behaviour is the lack of awareness and understanding of the care system and care experiences amongst school staff. Because of this, many young people did not want to make others aware that they are being looked after. This is a complex issue; overall the evidence highlights the need for more and better child and young person-centred practice, where young people are actively involved in decision-making about how information regarding their looked after status is to be shared (Brodie and Morris, 2009).

At the same time, if it is known that a young person is being supported through an additional service provision, this may create an impression that the resources at school can be focused on someone else. For example, schools staff may perceive that a child in the care system is already entitled to a reasonable amount of support from elsewhere. Research points out, however, that educational attainment and relevant support is not recognised as priority by social workers (Harker et al., 2006). This discrepancy then results in the child’s academic development not being addressed by either party:

“They think you get more support than others... If you’ve got all right grades it makes you really good ... But because we were bordering on failing they just did not care... “

(Rowena)

Although there have been improvements in the support mechanisms for the attainment of vulnerable young people (for example, the introduction of the role of the Virtual Head and designated teachers), it is clear that school staff should

be made much more aware of young people's background and be more involved in their emotional support. Measures such as closer collaboration between schools and children's services, awareness training available for frontline staff, including designated teachers, and encouraging school staff to be more accessible to the young people are just a few that can improve matters further.

Conclusion

As demonstrated in this chapter, every young person's journey through life is a unique and complex combination of events and processes. However, there are certain threads that come through in the data analysis, such as movement through the care and education system, relationships with family, foster carers and peers, and the meanings that young people attach to life experiences.

Young people's stories echo the key messages in literature on issues surrounding development and life outcomes of vulnerable groups, as well as current service provision. Participants from care background and those accessing alternative education provision had more than a fair share of disadvantage before they reached adulthood, which is, in the words of Stephen, is "not their fault".

Movement is one of the key features of these young people's lives. For the looked after young people it starts with going into care and finishes when they go into independent living. Whilst being in care, several participants had a least two placement moves; two young people, Anita and Rowena, experienced multiple moves. There are, however, positive accounts of strong relationships with foster carers, where the latter provided on-going support and encouragement to the young people. As positive as these examples are, they are matched with an equal number of narratives depicting stress, uncertainty and participants' inability to understand the reasons behind these traumatic experiences.

The role of the social services and regular contact with social workers is also highlighted in the chapter. Only a few young people could describe their relationship with their social worker as positive and helpful. For most, however, the experience of social services was one of irregular contact, insufficient or inadequate provision of information advice and guidance, as well as lack of expectations.

Similarly, the participants' journeys through education have been patchy. The findings of the study point to lack of understanding of young people's needs and behaviours amongst school staff. In particular, this relates to mainstream education and is equally representative of young people in, and outside the care system. In mainstream schools, only a few young people could name a member of staff who was supportive and encouraging; mostly, however, they speak of not being noticed or in any way supported. When it comes to academic or developmental opportunities, the majority of the sample had difficulty to name any; those who did, were mainly engaged in clubs or activities separate from school or social services. Many young people spoke about feeling stigmatised and misunderstood - by both staff and peers. This is an issue that is often forgotten, in particular, in policy, where other priorities take place.

An inseparable part of these journeys through care and education is young people's interactions with other people, including family members, foster carers and peers. The role of a supportive friend or adult came through very clearly in the research. Again, the experiences vary greatly: whilst some of the young people enjoyed positive friendships and relationships with family members or foster carers, others could only name one person that they had a connection with. This scarcity of connections and support networks is crucial and dangerous for already disadvantaged young people who are too often let down by the services that are put in charge of their protection and care. The structures that

exist around these young people often do not deliver - this problem has been exacerbated further by public cuts and changes that affected local authorities.

In the background of these changes and challenges, however, a certain shift has occurred in the lives and self-perceptions of the young people, and it appears to be a positive change overall. The way the participants describe themselves and their circumstances at the point of interview differ from their reflections on the past; the descriptions are positive. Despite objective difficulties, certain protective factors contributed to the young people's developmental journey, including support and encouragement from individuals they could trust, positive relationships and rare opportunities, as well as young people's individual characteristics. Somewhere in the middle of this journey lies their experience of Aimhigher activity, which may have contributed to the overall change in young people's disposition. The next chapter examines the role of Aimhigher in young people's lives and its impact on where they are today.

7 The participants' experiences of Aimhigher

Introduction

At this point in the exploration, it is useful to go back to the research questions set at the start of the study, and to connect to the narrative so far. One of the tasks of this research is to establish the role Aimhigher participation may have played in the lives of the participants. Before Aimhigher impact could be established, it was important to explore whether any type of change had occurred in relation to the young people and their journeys. The next step would be to position the Aimhigher experience within those journeys.

As Chapter 6 demonstrates, young people's lives represent dynamic trajectories constructed of multiple processes and events, which include individual transitions through adolescence, care and education system. The analysis of young people's accounts suggests that a certain change has occurred in the way the participants perceived themselves and their lives in comparison to those in the past. Although it is clear that there had been a multitude of events and experiences that contributed to this change, it is possible and reasonable to examine whether and how that Aimhigher played its part in the transformation. The chapter argues that Aimhigher is important in these contexts, and examines the nature of that significance in greater detail. It describes the nature of young people's experience of Aimhigher, and how they viewed its significance in their lives.

As detailed in Chapter 5, every young person in the sample took part in at least one Aimhigher activity. Whereas some young people attended a four-day residential, others were a part of a mentoring scheme and a university campus visit in addition to that. As most Aimhigher programmes were designed around the key milestones in the education system, most of the young people in the sample came into contact with Aimhigher between the age of 14 and 16 as a part of the post-secondary transition. As the remit of Aimhigher was around raising awareness of aspirations around academic achievement, and, in particular, HE, this chapter explores the impact of Aimhigher in terms of these areas. Finally, the chapter positions Aimhigher in the background of other services that form a part of the support entitlement for young people looked after and in alternative education.

Young people's memories of Aimhigher activity

Before this chapter goes on to explore the impact of Aimhigher, it is useful to provide a brief description of the activities themselves, as remembered by the young people in the study. In their interviews, all young people in the sample without exception stated that they enjoyed the activities they took part in. However, their descriptions of what actually went on are at times brief and patchy, especially for those who had taken part in the activity several years prior to the interview. With this in mind, the data represents their memories of and reflections on their past.

That said, some interesting information emerges. Arthur attended a residential event that focused on independent skills for care leavers; whereas Claire took part in a mentoring scheme designed around options around progression onto FE and HE. Interestingly, both Claire and Arthur recall that when they went on an Aimhigher course, they were not really interested in going to university (which

they associated the initiative about). They were not sure what to expect from the activity and attended following a recommendation of a member of staff (social worker in Arthur's case; teacher in Claire's case). In fact, most young people report lack of understanding and awareness of the content of the programme or its aims (prior to signing up). For the vast majority in the sample, their participation was due to the fact that a teacher or a social worker recommended it as a beneficial opportunity. Not surprising, perhaps, that most young people did not have much expectation of what they were signing up for. Some of them were quite worried to leave their established routines or try something new, others were not convinced that it is going to be any different from school:

"I thought it was going to be rubbish. Thought it'll be boring. I was quite worried"

(Thomas)

"I thought it's going to be a part of a lesson but it was more fun"

(Davina)

This suggests that the adults responsible for involving young people in these activities may have had to work hard to encourage their participation, and to make sure this actually happened. Despite these worries and doubts, however, all of the young people in the sample found it "fun", "enjoyable" and "cool". Carl describes the residential as a "cool trip, good chance to make new friends". He was particularly fond of the activity that involved tractor driving. Similarly, Zamir refers to his experience as "loads of fun":

"When I lost my key, then someone came and opened my room... Could do with more tractor driving"

Most Aimhigher events aimed at students from alternative education or care background mainly consisted of practical, hands-on activities that had potential

of being more engaging. These activities came under the umbrella of Aimhigher summer schools - (often residential) events that ran over several days, often during the summer. The residential activities that the young people took part in consisted of either outdoor sports type activities or art-related projects. Just like Carl and Zamir, Saleem and Jodie enjoyed the outdoor activities:

“We went for fun activities and... we went on the water...”

(Saleem)

“You had to work with water, a team building exercise. That was a real challenge; you had to work as a team. Raft building made me think... Meeting new people was great”

(Jodie)

Similarly, the young people who participated in arts-based projects, equally enjoyed it. Lorraine and Lee were a part of a week-long photography-based scheme, which incorporated a visit to the local university campus:

“That was really fun... being able to find different ways of taking pictures... That was exciting... “

(Lee)

Of course, finding an activity enjoyable and fun is not in itself a proof of any impact beyond the event. However, ‘enjoying’ is still important in terms of young people’s wellbeing as outlined in the ECM agenda (DfES, 2003). According to Sarah, Aimhigher remit

“...Corresponds with the whole ‘Enjoy and achieve’ from Every Child Matters, and Aimhigher does both. There has been a view that there is something wrong about having fun, that it’s bad... And young people had

a bloody good time with Aimhigher... Of course for some it was emotional... “

Sarah’s account suggests that Aimhigher “does both”, mainly, that Aimhigher contributed to the young people’s achievement. These findings echo the key messages in the literature on Aimhigher activities and the impact on the young people. For example, research conducted by Hatt, Baxter and Tate (2008; 2009) points to the particularly strong positive impact of summer school type activities on the young people’s aspirations and engagement in education . One of the factors creating this impact is the intensity of these activities combined with small numbers of participants in a group; the combination of these elements created a sense of being ‘immersed’ in the activity. At the same time, there is knowledge that points to lack of reliability of practice-based evaluations (Chilosi et al., 2009). The next part of the chapter provides more detail on Aimhigher impact according to the remit of the initiative, namely, with regards to the young people’s aspirations, attainment and awareness of future options.

“If it wasn’t for Aimhigher...”

As outlined in Chapter 3, the strategy for Aimhigher involved three ‘strands’ of activity, namely:

- raising aspirations of those who have the potential to progress onto university;
- raising awareness of the options and support available;
- support this transition to FE and/ or HE by contributing to the strategies aimed at improving attainment of these groups.

The data gathered from the interviews with both young people and practitioners demonstrates that this was consistent for at least half of the participants.

Sometimes a visit to a local university or speaking to someone a young person can relate to can make difference. Professionals interviewed for the study

provide insight into how attending an event organised by Aimhigher would give young people a long-term perspective:

“[Aimhigher] gives them options and ideas about the future, and... different ways of how they can achieve rather than what they are normally told at schools”

(Michael)

“[It was about] widening their ideas and thoughts on opportunities for them in life... in the encouraging way as well”

(Becky)

As these accounts demonstrate, there are threads of creating awareness and, in parallel, ‘raising’ young people’s educational aspirations for their future. A raised aspiration can mean many things: sometimes it’s a young person who never thought of going to college actually goes on to further, and then HE; or, it’s someone who abandoned a ‘safer’ educational choice in order to pursue his dream. Or, it is equally powerful when someone who finds it difficult to get through the years of compulsory school curriculum suddenly gets the ‘second wind’ because he or she has something to look forward to post-GCSE.

One of these young people is Carl - he admits that when he was younger, his ambition was to be “a social worker, or a singer”. His academic aspirations are already quite high; he does social care and psychology at college, as his carers are encouraging him to aim towards a “more stable career”. However, in his own words, he “likes it, but not as much” compared to singing, which he had been “randomly” doing. Carl believes that

“...if it was not for Aimhigher... acting and singing would have still been a dream”.

Carl attended two residential events organised by Aimhigher - a generic aspirational event for looked after children and an event that had a specific focus

on creative disciplines - art, performing arts, signing and dance. Both events were important in terms of Carl's aspirations, making friends and understanding the options that are open to him post-school. It is possible that it is the second event that made him realise how much signing meant to him and helped him believe that he can take this further. The twenty-year-old recalls, what impact this experience made on his overall confidence and on his attainment:

"All grades went up, everything passed! That's just me believing I can do it!"

Carl's ambition did not stop there - at the time of the interview he was moving to another city, because he recently found out that he got a place at on a performing arts course at university.

The story is similar for Stephen, who at the time of the interview just heard that he got accepted on a sports-related course at a university. It was not always like this for Stephen: he recalls how he did not have much support at school and felt overlooked. He sensed that "People in school did not believe in my potential", so he "literally focused on rugby and that's all". He also always suspected he may have dyslexia although this had not been diagnosed. Stephen signed up to do an Aimhigher residential that was delivered in an outdoor sports college - mainly, because it sounded like "fun" - and ended up signing on a FE course at that college. On completion, he felt ready to go to university. One of the reasons for Stephen to pursue this path was that he felt very strongly about children in care being stigmatised and stereotyped:

"...One of the things that really came out was people talking about people stereotyping you and questioning your ability "you can't do that", and I was like "I am going to prove you wrong and do that".

Stephen realises that his “main weaknesses will always be academic”, however, he was determined to get a degree, despite the advice he was getting from college staff:

“...When I was applying to go to uni, my tutors were like, you should seriously be looking at a foundation degree rather than at full degree. I know I’m gonna struggle but that’s my challenge to step up to the plane”.

These sound like the words of very enthusiastic young people, who feel excited about their future. Stephen himself admits that he somewhat agrees with his tutors, that he is going to ‘struggle’. The natural question would be, then, how prepared are these young people for getting through university? To answer this question the researcher would need to go back to the participants several years after the interview. What is known, however, is that their decisions to go to university were based more than just on being given hope of a brighter future. Analysing the participants’ stories demonstrates that it is often very hard to separate where fostering aspirations and raising awareness of realistic attainable options begins. For those young people whose decision to go to college or university was linked to Aimhigher experience, understanding what’s available to them in terms of support was very important. Older care leavers in the group were clear that Aimhigher did not only help them act on their aspirations, but also provided necessary information in terms of financial help and other support mechanisms available to that specific group:

“Another reason why I want to go to university is because I get a lot of funding. I was speaking to [Aimhigher staff], and she was like “what about your maintenance grant”

(Stephen)

“...I could be quite well off as a looked after child.”

(Anita)

For the younger participants, 14-year old Lorraine and sixteen-year old Lee, on the surface of it, the change may seem less dramatic: they both claim to have regained interest in going to school as a result of Aimhigher. This impact, however, should not be underestimated: this change of an increased attainment and attendance at a younger age carries the potential for bigger changes in the future, in particular, for those already disengaged. It is a significant change for Lee and Lorraine as both of them were in AP at the time of the interview - both as a result of very stressful experiences in a mainstream school, which affected their academic progress. Disillusioned about education and going to school for some time, the young people reveal that after taking part in an Aimhigher activity they became more interested in education, as they became more hopeful about their future:

“[Aimhigher] made me realise... what I can achieve in a couple of years... it’s exciting and... something you want to reach out and kind of get to”

(Lee)

“I started seeing a point to going to school...”

(Lorraine)

These small changes, in particular in young people with complex needs, are encouraging and precious; if recognised and supported, they can have long-term impact on the child’s life. Anne, a teacher at the AP unit, claims that that some of the young people have “really moved on”, and Lorraine is now coming in four days a week - compared to one day a week. Similarly, another member of staff, Becky, speaks about another student, Cheryl, who “does not come to class, she sits in the foyer”. Cheryl was able to make what can be considered a remarkable transformation: after trying the first day of the five-day Aimhigher event, she “did the whole week, that’s the only time she’s ever done the whole week”. Even if “this change does not last forever but a little bit stays” (Sarah, social work professional), the value is clear.

Alongside this positive evidence, there are single voices of young people in the sample, who enjoyed Aimhigher activities but didn't think it affected their aspirations and decision making. This is important, as evaluative information can be over-positive in ascribing change to a particular intervention. Saleem recalls the Aimhigher experience with fondness; however, he states that he always knew what he wanted to do in life:

"I would still go to college or university; I always wanted to".

Saleem's words are very much in line with what is currently known about aspirations of asylum seeking and refugee children. A recent report titled "I just want to study" (Refugee Support Network, 2012) presents these young people as having high educational aspirations and great potential. Too often, however, they are faced with inadequate advice and lack of support, complicated further by legal obstacles and language difficulties.

Aimhigher impact: a bigger change

Stories like Saleem's bring balance to the study and act as a reminder that everybody's journey is different; and a particular intervention may not have the same effect on different young people. However, the interview data also suggests that for many participants in the group, Aimhigher contributed to certain aspects of their development. In particular, there is evidence that taking part in Aimhigher activity had an impact on young people's self awareness. This view is strongly supported by the professionals who took part in the study. Learning to understand and see oneself in an objective way is inseparable part of maturing and growing up for any young person. For disadvantaged young people, however, this phenomenon has an extra dimension: for many, raised self awareness and aspiration means separating their own view of themselves from the perception they have developed as a result of continuous stigmatisation and stereotyping. This involves disassociating oneself from the familiar social

structures and, ultimately, what some authors consider a process of identity transformation (Morrison-Gutman and Akerman, 2008; Riddell, 2010). Michael describes the effect that the Aimhigher interventions had on his students:

“You’re taken out of what’s normal... You can experience all kinds of things that you wouldn’t normally experience. You see yourself in lots of different lights”.

Sarah witnessed a similar process in the looked after young people who she referred for taking part in a residential:

“Aimhigher helps them see their own strong and weak points... They push themselves beyond what they thought they are capable of”.

Indeed, many young people in the sample speak about changes in their personal characteristics and attitudes, such as increased social competence, self-belief and overall competence; developing new skills and feeling more independent and resourceful. For example, Stephen, who did not receive much support at school and was advised to go into bricklaying, admits that “if it wasn’t for Aimhigher” he would not have found himself in further and then HE doing something he loves (outdoor sports). He speaks of his newly found confidence and the way he approaches challenges. Other young people in the sample use the word “change” in their reflections on Aimhigher and its impact on their lives. Thomas, a looked after young person in alternative education who attended an outdoor residential and a photography project, admits that Aimhigher

“...Made me a better person. Changed me. Made me more confident. I met new people. New people, been to new clubs, More confidence in my ability, ‘I can do’ attitude instead of ‘I can’t’”.

Likewise, Femi, who took part in an arts-based residential event as a result of a referral from his PRU, recalls that

“This [experience] made me a better person. Helped me boost up my confidence and know I can do better in life. If you share a dream it can come true, you make sure you push, you push and you work hard”.

Indeed, the accounts of other people are almost unanimous when it comes to connecting Aimhigher participation to building their confidence. In fact, even young people like Saleem or Zamir, who did not necessarily see that taking part in Aimhigher activities affected their education-related motivations, spoke of increased sense of self-confidence. This finding supports earlier research that links out-of-school activities to raising confidence levels in young people. For example, Carreres-Ponsoda et al. (2012) claim that sports-related extra-curricular have the most impact on the young people’s confidence levels, as well as prosocial behaviour, self-efficacy and overall positive development. The importance of outdoor environment has also been documented (Thomas, 2012). Coholic (2011) researched the impact of the arts-based interventions on children who are accessing the child protection services or mental health support systems. The findings suggest that arts-based activity plays a vital role in improving young people’s self-esteem, self-awareness and self-efficacy, by supporting young people in developing mindfulness. Coholic’s study also made a link between the mechanisms behind these activities and resilience building. This claim supports the view of Aimhigher arts-related projects as contributing to strengthening young people’s internal domains of resilience.

Another theme that comes through in young people’s and practitioners’ stories is increased social competence, namely, ability to socialise, meet new people and make new friends. Every young person reported that they made friends during the Aimhigher activity. Mentioning “new people”, or “different people”, or “new friends” was, again, without exception a part of everybody’s description of their

Aimhigher experience. This finding was also strongly supported by the satellite context. Zamir's words provide a good illustration of this:

"It did give me more confidence. I met new people. I became more confident with other people".

Furthermore, not only the young people made friends during the activity, many stayed in touch. This is equally true for the older participants, who took part in Aimhigher interventions several years before the interview. This is important for young people whose relationships have often been as disrupted as their placements. The evidence also suggests that, similar to Zamir, many young people found it easier to socialise and be in the company of people they would not know. This is a very positive finding, as social competence has been linked to reducing behaviour-related difficulties, as well as building resilience and leading to positive life outcomes (Jackson and Martin, 1999; Gundersen, 2010). In addition, developmental psychology research draws a link between leisure activity and children's development of social competence (Poulin et al., 2012). Although Aimhigher provided organised activities designed around educational aims and aspirations, the core elements are comparable to those of leisure, which is also supported by the young people's descriptions thereof. Leisure activities have also been recognised in policy as an opportunity for social inclusion (Walker and Donaldson, 2010).

In addition to improved self-awareness, raised self-confidence and social competence, young people also speak of feeling more independent and resourceful in their everyday life. Firstly, the care leavers who took part in the residential designed around independent skills, found it very useful in terms of practical independent skills and confidence that they "can do it on their own". For Arthur, it meant knowing how far his money can go once lives independently,

basic budgeting and household skills and the confidence that comes with it. He remembers that before Aimhigher, he

“...hadn’t been introduced to the way of doing things... [The residential] definitely helped me understand how real life works...”

Secondly, it seems that even those who attended other events found that taking part in an Aimhigher event helped them. Thomas, a looked after child in alternative education, attended two events that made him “fostered and independent”. He was apprehensive when he was invited to participate, but found it enjoyable and beneficial. When asked what he would tell other young people about Aimhigher, Thomas replies:

“I’d say you miss Eastenders but there’s probably going to be one experience in lifetime. You’ll have more confidence in yourself. I faced my fears”

Similarly, Amelie calls the experience “eye-opening”. Another care leaver, Stephanie, states that the Aimhigher trip

“...definitely changed me, I am not scared of doing things on my own any more”.

This newly found sense of confidence and independence is useful for any developing young person in moving into adulthood. It is even more vital, however, for the vulnerable young people who have faced multiple obstacles and may not necessarily have readily available support networks. Developing resourcefulness and self-efficacy will enable the young person to utilise these sources of support and thus equip them for the future. Stephen is a good example of this, as he learnt how to access various agencies and resources that could help him:

“...gave me more contacts to help me, to benefit me, to advise me”.

In fact, Stephen stayed in touch with Aimhigher after taking part in a residential activity at the age of fifteen. He contacted Aimhigher regularly in search of other opportunities. Of course, what Stephen describes may be a combination of his own resourcefulness and social skills. Indeed, as argued in this study, any outcome is a combination of several factors - for Stephen, this could be the opportunities he has been exposed to, coupled with the encouragement coming from his support network and his own internal qualities. However, Aimhigher still played a role in this process, as Stephen himself illustrates:

“Aimhigher helped me develop. And when I’ve done college and come in, [Aimhigher staff say], keep on doing it, and that’s the motivation for me. It’s the interaction between the AH staff members and myself. I take it in. And I do that with social services, and college. I am using all my resources.”

Stephen’s reflection on his journey is a positive illustration of how continuity of support can make a difference to the young person’s choices, experiences and life outcomes.

Mechanisms of Aimhigher interventions

So far this chapter has focussed on what the young people remembered about taking part in Aimhigher activities and, more importantly, the type of impact they attribute to this experience. The participants’ memories of Aimhigher are mostly positive; so are their words with regards to how it affected their beliefs, perceptions and choices. At the same time, more clarity is needed around the mechanisms which underpinned Aimhigher activities and, possibly, were instrumental in creating this positive impact.

One of the themes coming through in young people's and practitioners' descriptions of Aimhigher is the theme of "different" and "new". As the virtual school head Sarah describes it, Aimhigher "gives young people experiences they would not have"; she even goes on to describe the residentials as "invaluable, so ground breaking". Although the accounts of others are more modest, they still support the theme of Aimhigher being unlike other services. "New" mainly relates to various elements of the experience, specifically, the venue and the environment. At the same time, the participants use the word "different" to describe not only the venue or environment, but to set Aimhigher experience apart from other experiences (such as accessing social services) and environments (such as classroom environment):

"Different groups, different environments, different situations"

(Anne)

Similarly, another teacher in alternative setting describes how taking part in an Aimhigher event differed from what young people would experience in the classroom:

"...it's so different from being at school, the opportunity to go to university and wander round..."

(Kevin)

Stephanie recalls how "everything was different, new, unexpected"; for Amelie, "everybody was a new face" and Thomas recalls that for him it was

".. A new experience, trying something different... I thought it was going to be rubbish"

Thomas's words draw attention to the fact that his initial expectations of the Aimhigher experiences were not very high; his opinion is a rather accurate reflection of what most of the young people expected it to be. For example, Carl

expected his residential summer school experience to be “talking and boring”, whereas he found it “a million times better”. Interestingly, some young people used “boring” and “school” in one sentence. This finding supports the surprising as there is evidence to suggest that many learners today find school uninspiring and irrelevant (Edge Foundation, 2012; City and Guilds, 2012; Murray, 2012). What it can also be revealing, however, is that current approaches within the education system can be out of touch with the needs of at least some children. This is particularly relevant with regards to the children from disadvantaged background and with complex needs (Hart and Aumann, 2009).

With regards to Aimhigher, however, the majority of the people in the sample did not only find it “exciting”, but, interestingly, “a challenge”. It is closely connected to the idea of “new” and “different”, with young people admitting to having doubts and fears before going, and even when getting to the event. The words of virtual school head Sarah sum up this concept succinctly:

“Aimhigher challenges them... it pushes them to mix with other people... They have to push themselves outside their comfort zone... They start off terrified, and then... it helps them grow up...”

Sarah touches upon the concept of the comfort zone, which is connected to Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development (Langford, 2005). Trying new, unknown activities that are outside their routines, allow the young people to learn new skills, improve their self awareness and transfer this newly found confidence (or competence) to other activities. According to Michael,

“...you’re taken out of what’s normal... You can experience all kinds of things that you wouldn’t normally experience... It brings a whole other focus and you see lots of different things, and you see yourself in lots of different lights”

The notion of transferable skills and competencies (Buckingham Shum and Deakin Crick, 2012) is an interesting one: research demonstrates that facing a challenge may encourage a change in a young person's personal, social and technical skills, which can have long-lasting benefits. For example, Stott and Hall (2003) report (perceived) changes in attitudes and behaviours in the research participants after a wilderness expedition; the authors also suggest a link can be made with learning transfer with regards to other areas, such as academic development. Lee describes, how participating in an art-related activity made him more confident not only at that particular task, but encouraged him to be more open to other activities:

“...It was something new. Before cooking I used to like taking pictures...
So it made me feel more confident ... to try something else you know”.

Understanding the learning process through the concept of zone of proximal development and transferable learning allows the researcher to link what appears to be a relatively simple extra-curricular activity to a number of potential transformations in a young person's attitudes and behaviours. It can be argued, that the process of broadening young people's academic awareness and aspirations are often inseparable from wider changes in the young person's overall perceptions and, potentially, actions. In other words, the learner identity transformation is closely intertwined with the shift in one's other identities, thus creating a cumulative impact (Bloomer and Hodgkinson, 2000). As discussed in Chapter 3, learner identity transformation was in the centre of research on impact of Aimhigher interventions (Hatt, Baxter and Tate, 2008; 2009):

“They saw how different people could be in a college of FE type setting.
And also the university wasn't full of posh kids who had bags of A levels –

people like them... it enabled them to see, they could achieve just the same”

(Samantha)

Understanding transferable competences as a result of expanding one’s zone of proximal development provides another insight, which presents challenges, or potential risks, as developmental opportunities. The latter then may be seen as a potentially protective factor and thus contribute to the young person’s resilience building. Indeed, recent research highlights the subjective nature of meanings attached to risk and protective factors by actors (as described in Chapter 2). It is important to note, however, that the type and level of challenge are crucial, as is the environment in which the challenge occurs. For example, Law (2002, p.642) suggests that a challenge that’s “just right” contributes to the experience of meaningful participation, which leads to multiple positive outcomes, including positive functionality and mental and emotional wellbeing. The author also relates meaningful participation to the Csikszentmihalyi’s notion of “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi and LeFevre, 1989, cited in Law, 2002). At the same time, being immersed in the “flow” of the process is related to the idea of enjoying oneself and having fun. For example, Lee found himself very engaged in the activities during a university campus visit; one of the activities involved getting to know the campus area by finding the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. For Lee, the “best thing” was when they got lost:

“...It was fun cause... We got to see more of the building... Took the wrong direction, ended up walking round and that, trying to find out way back”

Some of the participants also view Aimhigher in terms of sense of achievement that activities bring to the young people. For example, Michael recalls that all the students were “high when they come through the process; it lasted, felt good

afterwards and we can refer back to that". This is a good example of how sense of purpose and sense of achievement contribute to being in the flow and experience of meaningful participation. Michael's words also indicate that the practices used by Aimhigher were beneficial in a wider multi-agency context.

Interestingly, the idea of appropriate challenge goes in parallel with another, quite different concept - that is, the one of the "level playing field". This mainly comes from the interviewed practitioners, when they provide explanations of how Aimhigher operates. Anne reflects on how much more comfortable the students felt due to the fact that everybody was equally new to the experience:

"What was really important for their self esteem is that they all started on a level playing field... Something none of them had ever done before. Different ages and different abilities, but they all started at the same point... that really helped"

Anne's words may also draw attention once again to the earlier discussion of the activities not being academic-focused (although in an academic setting and involved students and teaching staff from further or HE). Making the activity "not like school" potentially removes the competition in an area that may be problematic and stressful for many vulnerable young people (Berridge et al., 2003). Arthur finds it positive that the activities were accessible for everyone in his group and

"... Involved everyone really well... I did not expect it to be very dynamic, but we were very involved".

As the quotations in this chapter demonstrate, the group work element seems to matter to both young people and practitioners: every participant in the study mentions group work in the positive light. Another element that is present throughout the chapter is the interactive and practical nature of most activities.

Both elements are grounded in theories of social learning and experiential learning, explored in Chapter 2. Learning new skills and expanding one's awareness of self and others features strongly in young people's accounts. Jodie describes her Aimhigher experience as

"... Trying out new things, meeting new people and getting to know your expectations..."

Similarly, Kevin's opinion was that one of the key features of Aimhigher is the fact that

"...They are also working in groups and interacting with each other in different ways than they normally would in a learning environment. This is really helpful for them as well... adds to their confidence".

According to another teacher, Kate, team work "instils confidence in them, a sense of achievement, to see the finished work". Team work is particularly important for vulnerable children, whose social skills may have been affected by trauma and adversity, as well as stigma and alienation. As Becky (teacher in alternative education) explains,

"A lot of them don't like meeting new people... Perhaps they would choose not to speak to someone they did not know, or assume that they ... would be judged in the bad light. But they've been shown that not everyone is like that".

Sarah's observation of how looked after young people find it during Aimhigher activities is not dissimilar:

“They are all in the same boat there, no best mate next to you, they are forced by the situation to socialise and make friends with different people”

Alongside social learning, experiential learning plays a big role the way young people engage with Aimhigher and the process of the activity itself. Young people remember hands-on, practical activities most vividly: tractor driving, assault course, problem solving challenges, making collages. Feedback forms in the ‘satellite’ context reveal that the participants’ favourite part of the activity is “getting messy”. In the interview, Zamir’s best memory was playing rounders on a rainy day:

“... There was so much rain, water everywhere. We played rounders. Spencer gave me a piggy back. That was fun”

What emerges from these stories is the way the activities were structured and delivered, which makes Aimhigher different from a classroom setting. This makes staff an important part of the interaction. For example, Tony connects the sense of fun with the sense of freedom, promoted by Aimhigher facilitators:

“There was lots of fun involved, you learn to do your own things, normally you are not allowed to do that. You gave us a bit of freedom”

It is important to mention here that one of the features of Aimhigher initiative was employing HE students, who could act as role models. These students, (often referred to as ‘ambassadors’ and, later, ‘associates’) would normally be representative of the Aimhigher cohort background (groups underrepresented in HE). As described in Chapter 3, the success of this Aimhigher strand resulted in a launch of a separate ‘Aimhigher Associates’ scheme, which bordered with mentoring. Indeed, the satellite context demonstrates that the learners mention Aimhigher ambassadors (or associates) as an influential group, alongside their parents and friends, when it comes to making decisions about their future

education. Research suggests that role models can be a powerful source of motivation for various groups; it is particularly beneficial for disadvantaged young people (Armour and Duncombe, 2012). Samantha describes the impact these undergraduates were having on her students:

“Especially with the mentors –absolutely brilliant, on their level... so enthusiastic about the young people... That’s another thing that impacted on the young people - they saw these mentors – doing all this – not for themselves, for them! They wanted to give to enable, to be aspirational for the young people”.

Many of Samantha’s students came from the background of extreme disadvantage, poverty and crime. Too often this means that the young people may be surrounded by other people “a bit too much like themselves”; Samantha stresses the importance of interaction with Aimhigher associates as a potential compensatory factor:

“... With the mentors there was enough outside influence that they don’t need to be showing off. The ambassadors made a difference”

Sarah’s observations echo Samantha’s words: “they become a family, the staff and other kids”. Sarah had attended and observed several residential events for looked after children and care leavers and is confident that

“... Aimhigher Associates are important role models... They built realistic expectations... there is aspiration but also practicalities”

Overall, the interview data demonstrates that Aimhigher staff and undergraduates acting as mentors made a big impact on the delivery of the activities and at least half of the young people. This is in the background of other evidence that highlights that Aimhigher contributed to the young people’s experiences and, potentially, future outcomes. There were, however, other

factor, and, most definitely agencies, providing support and guidance to looked after children and those in alternative education.

Aimhigher in the multi-agency context

As discussed in Chapter 3, the Aimhigher initiative was set up outside the already existing structures, such as compulsory education and the care system, which meant that the success of targeting and the actual running of the activity relied on links with other agencies. Therefore, Aimhigher relied heavily on partnerships and acted as a broker between HE and multiple gatekeepers, including schools and colleges, local authorities, charities and training providers (Judkins et al., 2005). The combination of close partnership work, HE remit and having to find effective tools to deliver the programme to the disaffected and the disengaged presents a complex landscape of service provision with potential gaps and overlaps.

Firstly, it is important to say that this research highlights examples of successful collaboration between Aimhigher and other agencies. Indeed, the research itself is an illustration of well-established relationships between the initiative and several providers and gate keepers that participated in the study. Moreover, the interviewed practitioners are very positive about this cross-sector work and the cumulative effect it can achieve. The words of virtual school head Sarah provide a helpful illustration:

“There are lots of services that have been of great help –Connexions, other service providers, social services. And there are role models in all those services and we all reinforce the message”

Femi’s story is a good example of this collaborative work in practice. He recalls that there was a whole support network of professionals around him at the time when he “got in trouble”:

“When I did stuff with Aimhigher, I had other people... they’d all invite me to activities, to make sure I am achieving and keeping away from trouble”

Similarly, Sandra believes that Aimhigher plays an important role in giving some of the excluded young people the motivation to do well. Several young people from this unit went on Aimhigher trips; in this instance, Sandra is speaking about a mentoring scheme delivered at the unit by Aimhigher associates:

“[Aimhigher] ... gives them the confidence to be that independent person to get back into school... Obviously we support them through it, but.... Chris is back in school and was on the programme... Carla, she’s making her way back into school, she is a very positive young lady at the moment. She talks about what she wants to do, and how she’s going to do it, that sort of thing... We do careers advice, that sort of thing, but it’s another avenue for them”

Sandra’s and Femi’s accounts demonstrate how effective multiagency work can bring very positive results for the young people and for the organisations. However, accounts like Femi’s are rare; often, where multiagency work is present, both young people and practitioners give their preference to Aimhigher. John, who was instrumental in referring many children from the care system to Aimhigher, admits that although the young people are

“... All supported by social workers, Connexions advisers, Aimhigher... actually gets to the young people more”.

The explanations for this vary. For example, John refers to mechanisms of information delivery and potentially distribution of resource within Aimhigher in comparison with social services. John also makes a connection between the interventions and young people’s future outcomes:

“The messages from Aimhigher sound more real. The reality of the situations and experiences is a much better tool than giving them a leaflet or saying, ‘this is what you could do’... Yes, that’s what I would say in terms of their opportunities and outcomes”.

In fact, all practitioners in the study highlighted the importance and the positive impact of the experiential nature of the activities. Both social services and teaching staff also reflect on the fact that the support around academic aspirations does not filter through to the young people who access their services. Stephen’s story comes to mind, when he was advised to go into bricklaying as he did not do very well academically. It transpires from the interview data, that Aimhigher may have been the only agency conveying the message of HE opportunities to the participants of the study:

“It becomes more real, they have access to university, having a look at it, being a part of it for a time, using university facilities. That it’s not necessarily just an academic place, but they can do more vocational courses, but at a degree level, it is important”.

Anita’s words reinforce this message; after attending a residential event organised at a local FEC, she recalls the impact it had on her and her peers:

“It had a knock-on effect for a lot of people, a lot of kids afterwards realised... especially going to [FEC], such a good idea... We did a lot of practical things, it showed that not all is down to writing and we did a lot of things that involve practical talent, like photography... and it puts in their mind, that there are different things to appreciate”.

Alongside this positive message, however, Anita also speaks about the support she received in comparison with social services: she speaks of receiving very little support from “overworked social workers” and the disappointment of having to “do her own research” on available opportunities. Likewise, Stephen’s

experience is that “some social workers may not say everything to us, what we are eligible for”. Another care leaver, Carl simply states that he had “more support from Aimhigher than social services”. The message here, therefore, is that at least some of this support comes down to the provision of correct and timely information, advice and guidance to the young people who have already been disadvantaged and often disengaged. For example, for Jodie, the most important thing about Aimhigher residential was

“...Getting to know the real life... Getting good advice. Like if you have a specific problem there is someone to talk about it”.

These statements lead to several important points. On one hand, Aimhigher acted as a source of support, encouragement and guidance for these young people, which helped them in their development. On the other hand, however, despite evidence of successful collaborative work between agencies, it seems that by delivering its remit, Aimhigher filled the gaps in provision from other services. An example of this is providing information to looked after children, care leavers around their post-compulsory options and, most importantly, financial support that they are entitled to. This finding points to potential lack of knowledge amongst the social workers and carers or lack of resource to make this knowledge available.

Similarly, it seems that young people who were accessing education in AP were not often presented with an opportunity to find out more about college and university. Of course, it is important to acknowledge that a HE route is not for everyone and other options are as viable, especially considering the cost of university degrees and the current state of economy (Williams, 2013). However, the important message here is for the young people to have access to all options available to them and be able to make an informed choice - which they may have been denied. It is also useful to point out that knowing one's options is not the

solution to all the problems: broadening young people's awareness and aspirations may be the start, but is definitely not the end of the journey. Young people's needs should then be appropriately supported to match their aspirations and to give them equal chances in life. However, as Chapter 6 demonstrates, this was far from reality for many young people in the sample - instead, the majority reported lack of appropriate support from school and social services.

On the positive note, however, the practitioners were interested in adopting some of the practices, in particular, the teaching staff in an alternative school:

“Seeing how they worked in that sort of format... We are thinking of using some of those things in what we do... “

(Becky)

The professionals at Becky's school were very positive about using group work as a method of content delivery; they also appreciated how well the students responded to the interactive and play-like nature of Aimhigher activities. This is generally supported by other practitioners in the study: for example, John and Sandra highlighted the fact that looked after children and those placed in AP do not often get involved in organised group interaction. Similarly, advice and guidance by other services, such as Connexions, is generally delivered on a one-to-one basis. However, this finding comes with a disclaimer: although the practitioners were clear on the benefits of the Aimhigher activities, not all of them felt that they could embed them easily. It is possible that Becky's school had the capacity to embed some of the practices due to its status. This particular school was a not-for-profit organisation and had more freedom in designing and delivering their curriculum. It may be more difficult for a mainstream school or social services would be able to incorporate new practices freely and speedily due to regulations and funding constraints. Indeed, the literature suggests that

alternative schools often have more freedom and flexibility when it comes to curriculum design and delivery (Kilpatrick, McCartan and McKeown, 2007; Gutherson, Davies and Daszkiewicz, 2011).

In fact, the same can be said about Aimhigher. The broad remit of Aimhigher and the flexibility of the funding allowed for the initiative to collaborate with partners, funded by different funding streams and as a result, reach out to so many different groups using a variety of methods (HEFCE, 2004; McCaig and Bowers-Brown, 2007). For example, Sarah named several events organised in collaboration with Aimhigher - she believed they were extremely beneficial for looked after children but would not be possible without the initiative's funds. This also included having the resource and flexibility to respond to the young people's needs quickly where other channels of provision were scarce:

“Aimhigher is very successful because it's flexible... Aimhigher to me is always going the extra mile...The funding was amazing - [it] helped so much!”

Indeed, Aimhigher seemed to be able to reach where other services could not - for a number of reasons. As illustrated by Sarah's account, WP remit stretched above and beyond some of the traditional methods of inspiring young people. It is not surprising, perhaps, that these activities had wider impact than just academic-related outcome. However, the same flexibility and “permissibility” has also been criticised in literature, as it was not always possible for partners to demonstrate that the funds were directed in accordance with Aimhigher remit. As an example, some schools used Aimhigher funding to purchase computers, pay for staff cover and transport (York Consulting, 2007).

Another thread coming through in this study is the issue around targeting mechanisms, which, ultimately, determine, who participates in the activity. As

discussed in Chapter 3, all young people from a care background were eligible for any Aimhigher intervention. Similarly, many students from alternative education would come under various eligibility categories (including disability, learning difficulties and socio-economic disadvantage). In practice, being a broker-type partnership, Aimhigher had to rely on other partners who had direct access to the learners and learner data. In practice it meant, that Aimhigher approached social services and education providers with a view to select students who would benefit from a certain intervention. For most looked after young people, a social worker would make a judgement and then issue a letter of invitation to a specific young person. For young people in AP, a school member of staff would act as messenger for Aimhigher; in some instances, an Aimhigher representative was invited to speak to a selected group of students.

There were a number of issues connected to this process: firstly, many looked after young people stated that “they did not know what to expect”, and that the information that was given to them was very scarce. One care leaver (Rowena) was invited to a residential on independent living, only to find herself on a residential for younger LACYP. Although she still found it very enjoyable and valuable, the fact still remains that she was misinformed. This apparent lack and incoherence of communication is not helpful, as providing correct information and more efficient matching would produce better outcomes for the young people – and make it more likely that young people would participate.

Similarly, alternative providers expressed the view that it is sometimes difficult for them to find several students who would be interested, or ready to take part in a scheme that is focused around further and HE provision. The difficulty here was the mismatch of the nature of AP (small student numbers) and Aimhigher remit (the majority of provision was expected to be on group level, including Associates scheme and residential events). This sometimes resulted in

alternative providers having to include students with particularly complex needs, who would affect the progress of others.

In the background of the debate around targeting and funding issues, however, it is clear that many young people benefited from activities organised by Aimhigher. Although the initiative ceased to exist in its original form, the plans to embed its best practice could make sure that the learners' experiences and outcomes are enhanced. The best practice would be embedded in the already existing provision structures, which would be done mainly through the local authorities (Aimhigher North Yorkshire, 2008). And again, this is supported, by the staff in this study willing to enhance their current practices based on what they saw Aimhigher do. However, this development was severely undermined by a series of public cuts that followed the closure of Aimhigher. In fact, the practitioners and young people were interviewed around the time when local authorities and schools were facing multiple redundancy measures, which affected mainstream schools, social services and AP. Sarah's account provides a vivid illustration of the impossibility of other services supporting the young people in the way Aimhigher did:

“..It takes for things to develop and take direction... We now have bare bones of the service, we say all this, this is important, etcetera, but there is not resource to do it, many people left... Bring back Aimhigher, it has seriously left a big gap”.

Sarah's words paint a stark picture of reality that the services, and therefore, the young people are facing. This includes not only the public sector, but also charitable provision. Despite the policy makers calling for “further clarification about, and further endorsement of, the use of public funding for wide-ranging, non-traditional activities and support services” (Walker and Donaldson, 2010, p.69), the evidence suggests that in reality, children and young people in the UK get less opportunities that will help them progress (Malik and Butler, 2010; NCB,

2011; The Guardian, 2013a). Therefore, not only the Aimhigher practice could not be embedded, it seems, vulnerable young people may have been left with less support than they had before Aimhigher. This raises serious concerns as to what capacity there is left to protect the experiences of the participants' young peers.

Conclusion

The discussion in this chapter demonstrates that taking part in Aimhigher initiative had a positive impact on most young people in the sample. There is evidence that suggests that Aimhigher contributed to raising education-related awareness and aspirations of the group. In certain instances, both learners and professionals reported improved attendance and attainment as a result of Aimhigher experience.

The interventions Aimhigher provided to young people from care and alternative education fit with one of the key messages of the ECM agenda, namely, "enjoy and achieve". The notion of enjoying one's experience is often lost in both policy and structured practice. Engaging young people in education in a way that is meaningful to them has potential to achieve bigger and better results for the young people and the system on the whole. This is particularly relevant for the groups whose access to opportunities is blocked and who may be disillusioned in the education and care system.

The findings of the study demonstrate that the influence of Aimhigher activities went outside the remit of this initiative: young people reported increased levels of confidence and overall aspiration; there is also evidence of the participants' increased levels of self-awareness, social competence and independence. These are all very valuable outcomes for the young people in the group as they contribute to the building of resilience in an individual.

The exploration into the mechanisms of achieving these positive outcomes points to a combination of tools and approaches utilised by Aimhigher. One of the messages that came from both young people and practitioners is around Aimhigher being “different” from the environments and provision that is on offer. Interactivity and group work seems to be an important element of the interventions, particularly in view of the fact that both children in care and in alternative education are not offered opportunities that involve interactions with peers from similar background. The principles of experiential and social learning also contributed to the success of the experience. Additionally, presence of relatable role models, such as undergraduates is viewed as a contributing factor.

It is important to remember, however, that Aimhigher was a part of the provision around the young person; other agencies that, arguably, were placed to be in closer contact with the participants, include social services, schools, career advisors and the like. Indeed, there is evidence that in some instances these collaborations were effective in supporting the young people and acting as a protective factor. However, many young people in the sample stated that Aimhigher staff and ambassadors often provided more information and support than other services. There were also instances, where Aimhigher seemed to be filling the gap created by another IAG provider. This finding points to gaps and inefficiencies within other systems including social services and mainstream schools.

Reasons for these discrepancies are varied. On one hand, flexible partnership approach exercised by Aimhigher allowed for innovative and speedy solutions to meeting young people’s needs. On the other hand, inflexibility and scarcity of resource within structures governed by the local authorities made the

comparison more evident. The situation was exacerbated by a series of public cuts; termination of Aimhigher was one of the first events in this process. The change in the political landscape, which resulted in severely under-resourced public and charitable sector, made it challenging to embed best practice accumulated by Aimhigher partnerships.

This study clearly demonstrates the positive difference initiatives like Aimhigher can achieve in supporting vulnerable young people. Participants' accounts provide a detailed picture of what works in building their resilience and contributing to better life outcomes. Whether Aimhigher methods are replicated by the existing services or a new, impartial provision is created, is secondary. The primary concern is that the support and guidance - or, indeed, the lack thereof is affecting the young people's experiences every day, adding to the stresses, or the protective factors in their already challenging lives.

8 Journeys of resilience

Introduction

In the previous chapters, the discussion has been focused around the changes in the lives of nineteen young people from the care system or alternative education, and the part Aimhigher initiative played in contributing to the change. Chapter 6 outlined multiple journeys that the young people embark on when they make transitions through adolescence, care system and education. It has been established that these transitions are complex, interconnected and often riddled with difficulties. Chapter 7 presented a detailed exploration of the elements that constituted the whole of Aimhigher interventions and the impact that the latter had on the participants.

Indeed, the research evidence points to the fact that overall both young people and practitioners often saw Aimhigher experience as instrumental in shaping their pathways. The participants report a change in their self awareness, aspirations and confidence levels. For some, Aimhigher helped on the way to higher qualifications; for others, it opened their eyes to the opportunities and acted as an encouragement to take them.

It is important to remember, however, that Aimhigher experience took place in the background of many other events and processes, which had both positive

and negative effect on the young people's overall development. These interconnected events and processes include movement in and out of care, education-related experiences, lost and newly formed relationships and the participants' individual characteristics. All these factors construct a complex environment, which interacts with the young person at each given moment and over time. Too often, however, the services in place have the tools and processes to support single domains of the child's life, rather than being able to see the whole picture. A resilience framework provides scope for taking multiple events and processes into consideration and thus understanding this interaction as an on-going dynamic process. This brings the discussion to the third research question, which focuses on the young people's life trajectories as journeys of resilience and aims higher experience as one of the building blocks.

As outlined in Chapter 2, the two necessary elements for building resilience are a presence of risk and evidence of coping with, or overcoming the risk with a potential for a positive outcome. So far in this study it has been argued that despite facing multiple challenges and setbacks, the data demonstrates that young people's perceptions of themselves and their lives are more positive than they were in the past. In fact, at the time of the interview some of them were achieving more than is statistically expected of vulnerable young people in their circumstances. This includes, in particular, the care leavers who were applying to go to university or were already in HE. One of the aims of this study, therefore, is to establish what contributed to these positive outcomes despite the adversity.

This chapter argues that despite the risks and stresses, the journeys of the nineteen participants can, and should be seen as extraordinary and resilient. The discussion focuses on the cumulative impact of several factors, both acting as stressors and protectors. Additionally, the subjective meaning of these factors is explored. The discussion also focuses on the importance of key events in the

young people's lives, which present specific turning points in their trajectories. Finally, Aimhigher experience is positioned within this complex landscape as one of the key contributing factors.

Internal journeys of resilience

So far the discussion has focused mainly around the external factors in the young people's lives, as well as the impact of these factors as reported by the young people. This includes events, processes and people that form a part of their ecology. It has been established that to arrive where they are today, the young people had to play their part in complex interactions with their environments. While the actual events, experiences and support networks are a more tangible part of the interaction, the internal processes may be less evident, in particular, from the point of view of practice and policy. These internal processes represent changes in participants' personal attributes and contribute to the understanding of the overall concept of resilience.

With regards to these personal changes, Chapter 7 offers participants' descriptions of changes in their self-perceptions. Changes in the young people's behaviours and attitudes correspond with the internal resilience domains, such as their confidence, self-awareness and generic aspirations (Riddell, 2010). Other internal characteristics that are used to measure resilience are emotionality, self-efficacy and locus of control as well as social competence (Gullotta, 2008; Malti and Perren, 2012). The changes described in this section are important not only in terms of building resilience; they also point to developments of one's identity, or identities (Edwards and McKenzie, 2005; Davis and Reed, 2013). These messages around identity transformation echo other studies on Aimhigher participation and impact (Hatt, Baxter and Tate, 2008; 2009).

As described in the previous chapter, the findings from the study point to the fact that one of the biggest changes in the young people occurred around their social competence. All the young people stated that they find it easier to meet new people and to make new friends. Many of them connect these skills with generally being more confident. For example, Rowena states that she is

“A bit more outgoing than I was, definitely more confident than I was, I wanna be more involved, like, I don’t wanna be the one that sits in the corner any more... I’ve realised that by talking to other people I can learn a lot”

Indeed, this is a big change in comparison to the younger Rowena, who did not like speaking to people:

“Did not like it at all, I would avoid it if I could... When I was a foster kid, I never really got an opportunity to meet new people... If I could sit in the corner and not talk to anyone, I would”.

Other young people in the sample report similar changes. Arthur describes himself as “definitely more outgoing”. For Amelie, being able to meet new people is connected to having an open mind:

“My self-confidence has dramatically gone up. Before I didn’t know who to trust, now everybody’s different ... [Before] I was angry with the world. I was really narrow-minded, I thought I had enough people around me; I didn’t need nobody else... I love meeting people now. I am so open-minded compared to how I was when I was younger”

For others, the change in their social skills was not as dramatic. For example, Tony says that his ability to speak to other people has “probably gone up a little bit” but this is something he admits to generally struggling with. The same is true for Lee. Both boys were attending a school for pupils with learning disabilities and emotional and behavioural difficulties. As it is generally recognised that

students with complex needs have particular difficulties around social competence, this small change is very encouraging (Wear and Gray, 2003). Social competence is often linked with emotional competence and plays an important role in adolescent development (Gullotta, 2008; Malti and Perren, 2012). John's words about Stephen illustrate this phenomenon:

"Stephen has calmed down, interacts more effectively with both peers and adults, and he has a specific career plan which he seems to be following very well"

John also supports Amelie's earlier statement that reflects how her emotionality and temperament changed over time. His memory of Amelie when she was younger is a memory of a girl who was

"...Chaotic, unconfident, emotional... if she got upset she would either be angry and aggressive, or quite introvert and down".

However, the picture of Amelie at the time of the interview is very different:

"Amelie has become more mature, she's worked on her interaction with people... More stable... She's got positive outlook for the future now"

Likewise, Claire provides an explanation how her emotionality changed in describing how she reacted when her birthday celebration did not go as planned:

"Last year, I would cry and cry and cry... Now I just have just one day when I am down and the next day it's fine... I know how to pull myself back up. Before I could not do that at all"

Research suggests that temperament and emotionality are, in fact, not just predetermined by biological influences but are equally shaped by young people's experiences (Li-Grining, Pittman and Chase-Lansdale, 2003; Wachs, 2006).

Considering the challenges the participants of the study had to overcome, it is

not surprising that they often felt depressed, angry and emotional. For example, it is recognised that frequent moving and instability, insufficient support and lack of secure attachment are linked to difficulties in developing emotional competence (Furnivall, 2011). At the same time, there is evidence that despite the difficulties, some of the young people managed to develop their social and emotional skills successfully. As positive emotionality and balanced temperament contribute to building resilience (Wear and Gray, 2003), the accounts of the young people and practitioners suggest that some of the participants had a positive change in the way they respond to external events.

Another area that showed improvement in terms of resilience is young people's aspirations, both academic and in general. High aspirations are an important ingredient in achieving positive outcomes in life, including education and employment (Gutman and Akerman, 2008). The notion of aspirations (and high aspirations in particular) is of somewhat dual nature, when it comes to marginalised groups in society, including looked after children. On one hand, the issues around lower level of achievement and positive outcomes amongst vulnerable young people are well documented. On the other hand, however, it has also been recognised that one's aspirations are often determined by access to opportunities. Moreover, there are reasons to suggest that young people have dreams and aspirations, however, lack of recognition and support means that these dreams and aspirations do not get realised (Creegan, 2008; NCAS, 2010). The findings of this study echo the themes of disadvantage, providing a picture dominated by lack of provided opportunity. This comes through in the interview with Samantha:

“Anything that can take their blinkers off can only be a good thing. They are so narrow in their views, they have their little bubble that they live in, it's a very strong bubble. All they need is to be given an idea that possibly they can – then they can run with that idea”

Samantha links aspiration to self-awareness and understanding one's own worth. She shares her observation of one particular activity (during an Aimhigher event), in which the young people had to reflect on their past and plan their future:

"The *Tree of life* ... looked at where you've come from, where you are now, how you can progress and who can help you. It made all of them a lot more self aware. That was one of the big things – their self awareness. And their aspiration, because it was aspirational".

With regards to the young people's journey through life, Samantha provides an optimistic view of where they were at the time of the interview. Their lives are far from being trouble-free; however, their experiences seemed to be filled with a little more positivity, hope and sense of direction:

"I spoke to Calvin and Wendy, really happy and enjoying the course; Melanie... She wants to totally change direction... we said you must stick this out for a year, to prove you can stick with something... She's determined not to be a young mum. She knows where she wants to go now".

In line with Samantha's observation, many young people in the study spoke of feeling more motivated, having a sense of direction. Research evidence suggests that having aspirations at an early age contributes to building of emotional strength and resilience in young people (Flouri and Panourgia, 2012; MacConville and Rae, 2012). Despite their circumstances, all young people gave an indication of being hopeful about their future, even though the levels of the optimism were varied. Indeed, each young person was facing different circumstances; whilst some were enjoying the anticipation of moving on with their life and the opportunities it may bring, others were facing higher uncertainty. This is true for at least two young people, namely, Saleem, whose future in the UK was unknown, and Zamir, who was getting over the effects of the incorrect age

assessment and renewed contact with his birth parent. This said, Zamir reported that Aimhigher experience gave him more confidence; Saleem was hopeful to get qualifications and a career.

Saleem's example highlights yet again the issue of aspirations versus opportunities. Indeed, not being able to access opportunities presents a real problem for many young people in the sample and many more like them. There is, however, an interesting theme that comes through in this study: the interconnection of the young people's attitudes and availability of support and opportunities. Indeed, several young people in the sample reported that they did not feel there was much in terms of support and opportunities; this is supported by messages in the literature (Creegan, 2008; NCAS, 2010). At the same time, several young people, in particular, older participants who left care reported that at the time of the interview they felt that they were more likely to access support and opportunities. For example, Amelie states that the opportunities in her life

“... have always been there. I can now see them clearly and take them”.

Similarly, Anita's account echoes Amelie's words. Having gone through care and education without seeing much support and encouragement, Anita had to “do her own research” to access education and developmental opportunities she aspired to:

“you can create as many opportunities as you want, it's my responsibility to create opportunities for myself”

This finding points to the changes around young people's sense of agency and locus of control. However, individuals from marginalised groups may experience “bounded agency” (Evans, 2002), limited by wider societal inequality and disadvantage. A sense of agency and locus of control are also connected with

self-esteem and confidence and play an important role in resilience building (Gilligan, 2009). It has been well documented in the literature that vulnerable young people do not feel that their being heard; similarly, this is supported by the evidence that not enough effort is made to give these young people a voice (Winter, 2006; McLeod, 2007). Young people's stories demonstrate that being supported is as important as being able to participate in decisions that affect their current and future experiences. The care leavers in the study speak positively of feeling in control of their choices. For Claire, moving back to where her support network was based and being able to access education and training opportunities changed the way she felt about her life:

"I am very happy now... Before I wasn't in control of my life, I was in hell. Now, I made it the way I want it to be... it's been a good year. I am very excited about what the future holds..."

Similarly, another care leaver, Carl recalls that although he did not receive enough support from social services in the past, he perceived himself as a person who is in control of his own choices:

"I had more support from Aimhigher than Social services... I realised I don't have to lean on that support. I grew up; I stopped believing that people owe me everything".

Amelie's perception of herself at the time of the interview has also changed; her words demonstrate newly found maturity, responsibility and internal locus of control:

"I am becoming an adult and I move out into my new home, have to provide for myself.... I will still have support around me but there's not

going to be a guardian there, where, if I get in trouble, they take the blame. It'll be me, full adult, taking the blame".

Several young people in the sample have also exhibited trends of relational agency, whereby the young people felt empowered to help others on their journeys. Research suggests that one's capacity for relational agency is linked to identity formation and to building resilience (Edwards and McKenzie, 2005). The findings pointing to the expression of relational agency mainly belong to the older participants of the study, all of who are also care leavers. For example, not long before the time of the interview Amelie and Stephen were members of the Children's Panel meetings, organised by their LA. Amelie also described how she liked helping her brother, using the information that Aimhigher provided her with. This finding is supported by John's reflection:

"She has come out with more confidence and skills associated with presentation and offering other young people motivation and choices they did not have before"

Similarly, Rowena spoke about helping others through the voluntary projects she took part in:

"I did one [voluntary project] when I was at Sixth Form where we raised money for an orphanage... The one I am doing at the minute is a sort of arty project for young people...about experience in care and stuff...We are going out to youth groups and doing work with them. We are helping other people through doing them".

The insights into the lives of Amelie, Rowena, Stephen and other care leavers in this study present valuable information for research, policy and practice, as the information on experience post-care is relatively scarce (Duncalf, 2010). These accounts in particular paint a vivid complex picture of how the young people grow and develop over the years, in and outside the care system. The same can

be said for the participants who do not come from care background; overall, however, the descriptions of change are more detailed for the older participants. This can be explained by the fact that the time frame for exploration was generally longer for those aged 18-20.

Notwithstanding of age, young people's stories present nineteen unique journeys of resilience, constructed of the participants' interactions with their environments. The findings in this chapter correlate with the discussion in Chapter 6, which focuses on the participants' perceptions of self. These positive changes indicate that despite many adverse circumstances most participants' lives were turning for the better. For others, there were still major uncertainties; however, they, too, reported improvements across certain resilience domains. Of course, no child or adult can be resilient in every domain (NCH, 2007); furthermore, risk and protective factors are subjective, as well as their interpretation and impact. It is important to acquire deeper understanding of the ecology around the young person and their interaction with events, processes and people within.

Risk and protective factors: clusters and chain reactions

As demonstrated in the previous chapters, the nineteen young people in this study had to face multiple adversity early in life. Their journeys through care and education have been filled with lack of understanding of their complex needs, insufficient, or mismatched professional support, frequent movement and instability. Moreover, only a few had strong support networks to rely on in moments of difficulty. Many report feeling stigmatised as a result of their status as a looked after child, or someone who could not cope in mainstream education.

These are very serious and very real circumstances of real children and young people, which provide an explanation of their recognised vulnerability. However,

it is recognised in literature that adverse circumstances have to be present in order for resilience to occur (Masten et al., 1990, cited in Luthar, Cichetti and Becker, 2000). In other words, the way the young people coped with these challenges determines the resilient capacity they possess. As described in Chapter 2, although single events have an impact, it is the cumulative effect of several stressors that has the most adverse effect on one's resilient capacity. Similarly, these can be compensated or outweighed by single, or clustered positive factors. Combinations of factors may vary and can be comprised of several environmental, family-related factors and individual characteristics.

For example, as shown in Appendix 1, Amelie's story of her past life features a cluster of negative factors, including the death of her grandfather, instability of being in a children's home, school exclusion, being a part of the "wrong crowd" and lack of academic support. She also describes herself at that time as "angry", "emotional", a "ruthless teenager" who has an "attitude problem". Whilst the first group of factors is of external (environmental and family-related) nature, Amelie's description of herself points to resilience-related factors of temperament and negative emotionality. Indeed, it can be argued that her emotional behaviour was a reaction to the outside events and, ultimately, her defence mechanism; however, it can be seen as a negative factor as affecting her wellbeing further.

At the same time, some of these stressors may have been offset by such positive components as the presence of consistently protective grandmother, and eventually, moving in with a "supportive" and "direct" foster carer. Around that time, Amelie also got a supportive social worker. As Amelie got older, the composition of both positive and negative factors changed, with new ones emerging ("made a lot of friends in college"; "supportive brother") and some of the old ones disappearing (left "wrong crowd"). Some of the domains changed

their nature, for example, Amelie reports that her self-confidence has “dramatically gone up”, which has potential to offset some of the negative impact of feeling stigmatised and “not good enough” as a child in care.

Of course, everyone’s life trajectory is unique, filled with different interactions between the young person and the wider environment. Lee’s story, for example, also features an exclusion from school, but other factors surrounding the event are totally different. As demonstrated in Appendix 1, Lee’s past experiences feature lack of understanding of his complex needs and therefore support from school staff, which was followed by several school moves. Lee does not speak much of the effect these moves had on him, but the effects of the uncertainty and instability it creates are well documented (Galton, Gray and Ruddock, 1999). He describes that time as a “bad patch”, during which he “had that mode, had that rant” that paint a picture of a child in distress; he also mentions that he was “not going to lessons”.

Apart from the effect of the movements as such, it is important to acknowledge the stressful experiences that eventually trigger the move (Daniels et al., 2003; O’Regan, 2010). At the same time, he had a close friend whose friendship lasted throughout all these difficulties. He also had support of his grandmother, who had a positive influence on him, which is a protective factor similar to Amelie’s. At the time of the interview Lee was settling in an alternative school for students with emotional and behavioural difficulties, which provided a more nurturing environment for his needs. His friends and his grandmother were present in his life still, thus maintaining certain stability in his life.

As the examples demonstrate, no one story is the same, even if, on the surface of it, the young people have undergone a similar experience, such as school

exclusion, or have a protective factor in their lives, such as a supportive grandparent. These factors are not stand-alone phenomena; they interact with other factors in the young person's life. This said, it is possible to group certain events and processes into groups, or categories for the purposes of this study. As outlined in Chapter 2, resilience approach recognises three key domains, including individual characteristics of the child, family-related factors and the broader environment, such as the education or the care system (Luthar, Cichetti and Becker, 2000; NCH, 2007). It is important, however, to apply these domains to the societal landscape in which children in care and alternative education operate. These landscapes include the care and the education system and the related experiences, which affect the participants' lives across all three domains.

Looking at the interview data through the two prisms - of resilience domains as well as care and education systems - reveals certain clusters of events and factors that are helpful in understanding the young people's experiences. For the purposes of this study, all environmental and family-related domains can be presented as two key areas, namely, support networks and opportunities that are available to the young people through these networks. Gaining deeper understanding of the nature of support networks and opportunities, as well as their importance provides policy and practice with useful insights in the background of the earlier described transitions through care and education.

Support networks

Support networks are a key resilience domain that contributes to the successful development and growth of a child. These networks can be comprised of family members, friends, professionals and other supportive adults or peers. In the case the young people in this study, some of their support networks had been placed at risk as a result of the processes that follow being taken into care, being

excluded or placed into alternative education. This is, to say the least, most disadvantageous for this group as their lives had already been filled with traumatic events and experiences that would call for more, rather than less, support and attention. At the same time, having a support network can make all the difference (Social Work Inspection Agency, 2006; 2006b; Humphrey and Symes, 2010; Ryan, 2012). As some vulnerable young people may not have many people to rely on, the support networks in this study include family, friends and professionals. It also has to be acknowledged that supportive networks can be perceived as damaging or even abusive. This tension can be highly problematic, as the literature on foster care makes clear.

As shown in Figure 8:1, the participants' experiences vary. What is clear, however, that apart from Stephanie, no other young person in the group reported having a support network that consisted of family, friends and care and education professionals. Femi was the only other young person who had a large circle of support around him most of the time (he lost some of the friendships along the way). Overall, most of the young people in the sample have people around them, including friends, family members (including siblings and grandparents) and professionals. The participants are open about the support and encouragement they received from people close to them and what an important role it played.

However, at a closer look the picture is not as optimistic. Out of nineteen participants, only Stephanie's support network involves both a social worker and a school tutor. Furthermore, she states in her interview that apart from the one tutor, she did not receive any support or encouragement from other teaching staff. For other young people (whose entries are presented as 'yes and no'), their experience varied over time: the support was inconsistent due to movement and other changes, including other people leaving or even loved ones passing away.

Of course, certain occurrences are a part of a natural course of life. Nevertheless, as these young people's circles of support are relatively small, one person disappearing may have a dramatic impact on one's resilience. It is also worth mentioning that not all of the young people who have support networks were able to identify someone who they could call a supportive adult in their lives. In fact, this was the case for five people (Anita, Rowena, Saleem, Davina and Lorraine). Sadly, Davina and Lorraine had a supportive adult in the past but that changed due to that person not being there anymore.

Claire, Anita and Rowena stand out for very different reasons, compared to Stephanie and Femi. All three girls have access to very limited resources when it comes to people they can rely on. Moreover, the only person they identified as their supportive adult was someone relatively remote: for Claire, it was her friend's mother; For Anita, it was a LA professional. Anita provides a vivid description of her encounters with other people in her life, some of whom had direct duty of care for her wellbeing but did not seem to provide it:

"We've met the shittiest adults, crap parents, school, overworked social workers... it creates the individual".

The third girl, Rowena, mentions her school tutor as a supportive adult. She also spoke of the support she received from Aimhigher, as do other four young people in the sample. The latter finding raises particular concerns. Although it was evident in Chapter 7, that Aimhigher had a positive impact on the vast majority of the participants, the experience was, in fact, a short-term intervention, even if a young person took part in several activities. With Aimhigher being an outside broker type organisation, it would not be possible to maintain contact and provide ongoing support to the young people in the same way school staff or social workers do. The only exception is Stephen, who kept in contact with Aimhigher on his own initiative and participated in several activities.

The danger is, therefore, is Aimhigher initiative or its staff cannot become a part of the supportive network by design. For the young person it means that the connection that was created may not be sustained, thus adding to the lack of stability in the young person's life.

The same can be said about the young people whose support networks mainly consist of professionals, rather than family or social contacts. For example, Ajaz mentioned that he received support from his family and his tutor. This means, that when he leaves school there will only be one source of support left; of course, he may have a large family to fall back on. However, as the stories of other young people in care illustrate, this is not necessary the case. Most of them named one family member (mother, grandmother, brother, sister) as a source of family support.

Figure 8:1 Supportive networks in young people's lives

Name and age of participant	Family support	Support from foster carer	Friends	Social worker	Education professionals	Support from other people	Supportive adult
Carl , 19	Family	Yes	Yes and no	Care worker	No	Aimhigher	Care worker, Aimhigher
Arthur, 20	Family	Yes	Yes	Not reported	Form tutor	Cadets	Form tutor
Stephen, 20	"mum and brothers"	Yes	Yes	16+ social worker	No	Cadets Rugby Aimhigher	16+ social worker
Amelie, 18	Grandmother	Yes	Yes and no	Yes	No	Aimhigher	Grandmother
Alexandra, 16	No	Yes	Yes	Not reported	No	Boyfriend	Foster carer
Jodie, 17	No	Yes	Not reported	Not reported	No	Boyfriend	Foster carer
Ajaz, 15	Yes	Not reported	Not reported	Not reported	Yes	Not reported	Yes
Femi, 16	Yes	N/a	Yes and no	N/a	Yes	Connexions, Aimhigher	Parent, school staff
Claire, 18	No	No	Yes and no	No	No	Friend's mother	Friend's mother
Anita, 17	No	No	No	No	Yes and no	Social services staff (one)	No
Rowena, 18	No	No	Yes	No	Yes and no	One tutor Aimhigher	No
Saleem, 18	No	Not reported	Yes	Yes	Not reported	Not reported	Not reported

Figure 8:1 (continued) Supportive networks in young people's lives

Name and age of participant	Family support	Support from foster carer	Friends	Social worker	Education professionals	Support from other people	Supportive adult
Stephanie, 20	Brother	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes and no	One tutor Boyfriend	One tutor
Thomas, 15	No	No	Yes	Not reported	Yes and no	School tutor	School tutor
Lee, 15	Grandmother	N/a	One friend	N/a	Yes and no	Not reported	Grandmother
Davina, 14	Yes Sister	N/a	Not reported	N/a	Yes and no	Not reported	Yes and no
Tony, 15	Grandmother	N/a	Yes and no	N/a	Yes and no	Not reported	Grandmother
Lorraine, 14	Yes Sister	N/a	Yes and no	N/a	Yes and no	Not reported	Yes and no
Zamir, 16	No	Not reported	Not reported	Not reported	Yes and no	One teacher	One teacher (different)

It is important for these young people to have large, stable support networks in order to offset some of the inequality and adversity they face (Ryan, 2012).

Practitioners who are in contact with these children via the care and education route can play a vital role in enhancing this provision. This can not only be done by teaching staff and social workers providing an on-going high quality advice, support and encouragement. For looked after children, of course, social services play a key role in matching them with their placements and training foster carers. Moreover, public service providers can enhance personal experiences of

the young people by supporting their families, where this is possible, and creating opportunities that foster positive friendships. It will also be important for key personnel to be alert to changes in a young person's network, to recognise the significance of this for the young person and address issues of loss and change.

Opportunities

Support networks can be a useful resource for developmental opportunities for the young people. Lack of education and training opportunities for vulnerable young people has been recognised (The Who Cares Trust, 2012). As Creegan (2008) points out, truncation of opportunity takes many forms and can be a result, or a side effect of a multitude of events and processes. The danger is that it can then become a vicious circle, where adversity and related factors prevent young people from accessing opportunities; this, in its turn, leads to more negative life outcomes.

As outlined in Chapter 6, the majority of the young people had difficulty in describing opportunities they were offered through the education or social care channels. Some were able to name activities outside school, for example, Arthur, Stephen and Stephanie were members of Cadets; Zamir and Thomas speak about playing football in a club. For Rowena, there were opportunities at school but she was not able to take them as she was catching up on her education after a long gap in schooling. Rowena's example is a sharp illustration of how one factor, such as missing school as a result of placement movement, affected other aspects of her life once she was back in education. Figure 8:2 provides a summary of all opportunities mentioned by the young people.

For some, opportunities were still scarce around the time of the interview. For example, the only opportunity Alexandra could think of is an invitation from social services to speak at an event:

“There was this letter, where I get £10 a week to talk about what we’ve done and how it’s helped us”

It is not surprising perhaps that at least six young people in the sample consider taking part in an Aimhigher event an “amazing opportunity”. Indeed, as detailed in Chapter 7, many reported increased confidence and social competence, increased self awareness and motivation. This evidence suggests that Aimhigher acted as a developmental opportunity for the participants. As John sums it up,

“Aimhigher has given the young people the opportunities and information that they may not [otherwise] have had access to”.

Of course, it may be argued that there is an ambiguity with regards to the term ‘opportunity’: what is an opportunity for one child is not necessarily for another. As Claire puts it, an opportunity can present itself anywhere:

“Even small things, like going out somewhere, is a new opportunity”

Claire’s words point to the conclusion that she is able to take something away from every situation she encounters; this demonstrates internal characteristics, such as resourcefulness and flexible ability to learn. However, her words, together with the overall data on the young people’s access to opportunities, reveal the scarcity, or even non-existence of opportunities in their lives. In this regard, two arguments come to mind. Firstly, young people’s stories highlight the fact that there is either a lack of opportunities for them or they are not being actively encouraged to participate by the professionals in charge. Another reason could be that the opportunities that are available do not fit their needs. And thirdly, as detailed earlier in this chapter (in the ‘Internal journeys of resilience’

section), this may be linked to other factors, for example, young people's perceptions of what is available to them. The latter may be the result of the change across several resilience domains in the young people's life, both internal and external.

Figure 8:2 Opportunities available to the participants of the study

Name and age of participant	History of exclusion or movement to a special school	History of gaps in education or moving schools	Opportunities through education	Opportunities through care	Opportunities outside care / education
Carl , 19	Not reported	Gaps in education	Not reported	Not reported	Not reported
Arthur, 20	Not reported	Moving schools	Not reported	Not reported	Cadets Leadership course
Stephen, 20	Not reported	Not reported	Rugby	Not reported	Cadets Aimhigher
Amelie, 18	Exclusion	Both	Not reported	Not reported	Not reported
Alexandra, 16	Not reported	Not reported	Not reported	Not reported	Aimhigher
Jodie, 17	Not reported	Not reported	Not reported	Only one	Aimhigher
Ajaz, 15	Not reported	Not reported	Sailing	Not reported	Not reported
Femi, 16	Exclusion	Not reported	Yes	N/a	Family, friends Connexions
Claire, 18	Not reported	Both	Not reported	Not reported	Work
Anita, 17	EBD school	Both	Not reported	Not reported	Not reported

Rowena, 18	Not reported	Both	Yes but could not take part	Yes post-16	Not reported
Saleem, 18	Not reported	Gaps in education	Not reported	Not reported	Not reported

Figure 8:2 (continued) Opportunities available to the participants of the study

Name and age of participant	History of exclusion or movement to a special school	History of gaps in education or moving schools	Opportunities through education	Opportunities through care	Opportunities outside care / education
Stephanie, 20	Not reported	Not reported	Only one at university	Aimhigher	Cadets Aimhigher
Thomas, 15	Both	Both	Yes in alternative education, no in mainstream education	Not reported	Football (youth centre)
Lee, 15	Both	Both	Yes in PRU, no in a mainstream school	N/a	Not reported
Davina, 14	EBD school	Moving schools	Not reported	N/a	Aimhigher
Tony, 15	EBD school	Moving schools	Not reported	N/a	Aimhigher
Lorraine, 14	EBD school	Moving schools	Not reported	N/a	Not reported
Zamir, 16	Not reported	School age wrongly assessed	Football	Not reported	Not reported

The key message for policy and practice, however, is that the majority of the young people did not seem to be able to access developmental opportunities through either care or education. This is supported by the recommendations featured in the NICE guidance on the quality of life of vulnerable groups (NICE, 2010). Literature points to a number of factors behind this. As Rowena's example demonstrates, movement through the care and education system results in truncating further the opportunities for the young people (Brodie and Morris, 2009). In addition to this, lack of understanding of the young people's complex needs amongst teaching staff often excludes them from developmental experiences (Hart and Aumann, 2009; Mitchell, 2011). And finally, the low priority status that the social workers attach to the young people's academic progress may be another contributing factor (Kassem, Mufti and Robinson, 2006).

Lack of opportunities is a dangerous factor for the young people who have already been disadvantaged by their life experiences. As outlined in Chapter 2, meaningful participation in various developmental activities can act as a strong protective factor in building their resilience. Taking part in something that has a meaning to the young person leads to increased levels of confidence, social competence and other vital resilience domains (Law 2002). Developmental opportunities are an integral building block of the young people's overall quality of life, including emotional, social and economic wellbeing (Costanza et al., 2007). Creating more inclusive opportunities and actively promoting them to young people in care and in alternative education shifts the focus on developing and enhancing their strengths, thus shifting the balance from the risk paradigm.

Subjectivity of risk and protection

One of the complexities around understanding resilience as a part of human development is the subjectivity of risk and protection (Arlington and Wilson, 2000; Schoon, 2006). Indeed, participants' stories demonstrate that the impact of one and the same event is hardly ever straightforward and one-sided. Moving school or house, the support networks around the child, even working at a factory - all of these events and processes carry both risk and protection for the young person's overall resilience. For example, Carl, Femi and Amelie realise that their past friendships may not have been a positive influence on their own attitudes and behaviours. At the same time, it is possible to imagine, that at a certain point in their lives there peer groups presented an important support network for the young people. Carl and Amelie recall moving away and leaving that "wrong crowd" behind. Indeed, peer groups can have a powerful effect, in particular, in adolescence (Sweeting et al., 2011).

Likewise, when Arthur's foster carers moved house, he found it difficult to keep in touch with his group of friends. At the same time, he found that he was "getting a much better education" in a new school, which he appreciated. Later on, when Arthur left care and had to work at a factory in order to support himself financially, he found it a stressful experience. Having to work many hours at a young age could also be blocking him from accessing other opportunities, such as education. However, for Arthur this also meant financial independence and the motivation he needed to go into HE in order to improve his career prospects.

These examples demonstrate that alongside the established trends and meanings in policy and research, the real experiences of the young people are much more unique, subjective and complex. Despite the obvious difficulties around capturing such complex realities, it is nevertheless paramount that the voices of the young people come through.

Chain reactions and turning points

Another important insight into understanding resilience is the way stressful and protective events are clustered over time, forming chain reactions. For example, for Jodie, having supportive foster carers who had high expectations of her affected her once “average” grades; at the time of the interview, she reported she was pleased with her high grades at college (as shown in Appendix 1). This was despite her peers’ opinion that “college is rubbish”; she admits that “the thing I did wrong is I took their opinion”. She found the Aimhigher experience “a real challenge” and an opportunity to meet new people. It is possible to assume that Aimhigher may have strengthened some of her beliefs when it comes to going to college, however, it would probably not have been possible without the encouragement and high expectations of her foster carers. Jodie also describes herself as quite a determined individual, despite also being “shy, quite and scared”:

“If I think I can do something I will give it a go”.

Therefore, Jodie’s experiences at the time of the interview were the result of a combination of factors, such as her carers’ support, her own qualities and external events and influences.

For Claire, her strict foster carers may have helped her to focus on her academic achievement, however, lack of emotional support from family or foster carers may have been the reason for her feeling “down, so down”. This combined with being “stuck” in a different town in a deprived environment made her feel “almost depressed”. Having to move away separated Claire from the only support network she had, which consisted of her friend and her friend’s mother, who Claire called ‘aunt’. Despite this, Claire made a decision to make changes in her life and move back to the place where she felt comfortable and supported.

For another young person, Zamir one particular event, namely the mistaken attribution of his age, had a major effect on his academic attainment as well as emotional wellbeing. At the same time, his support network consisted of one supportive adult at his school and a few friends. Although he reports that Aimhigher experience gave him more confidence, it would, perhaps, be overambitious to expect that taking part in a three-day residential would offset the damage that had been created by months of stress.

For others, however, Aimhigher occupied a different place in the chain of life events. Carl's story of his academic progression is one of the examples that come to mind. Tracing back his life journey from the time of the interview reveals that before he arrived at university, doing a subject he loves, he had to get over certain milestones. The latter represented a mixture of having a positive support network, going into college and then getting a confidence boost from taking part in an Aimhigher event. It is this final boost that helped Carl to make a decision to change the direction of his academic career and pursue his preferred option - performing arts:

"It helped me work out in which direction to go... Focus on my skills".

Similarly, another care leaver, Stephen, who was finishing college and applying to university at the time of the interview, states that he would not have been there "if it wasn't for Aimhigher". Although he did not receive sufficient support in school, having supportive family members and foster carer kept him going; being on an Aimhigher residential gave him the boost he needed.

The life trajectories in the Appendix 1 demonstrate how complex and different the young people's journeys have been to get them where they are today. It is difficult, if not impossible, for the researcher to establish exactly the factors that were more, or less important in the young people's lives. The reason for this is

the subjectivity of these events and their meanings, as well as the multilayered effect they have on each other. However, the young people were able to identify key events that had most impact within the timeframe broadly described as before and after Aimhigher.

When asked about the key events and people that affected their lives in the time “since Aimhigher”, the participants have very different answers. The young people name events which range from independent living, education-related experiences, taking part in certain experiences (including Aimhigher) and family events. These milestones in the young people’s lives present turning points, which are powerful moments that have potential to cause dramatic changes in one’s life. Turning points are recognised in the resilience literature as vital components of change, which provide explanation of how resilience is fostered in most adverse circumstances (King, Brown and Smith, 2003). Research evidence suggests that turning points carry capacity to disrupt on-going processes caused by chains of negative events (Edwards and McKenzie 2005; Johnson and Howard, 2007), or in the words of Anita, “break a lot of cycles”.

Similarly, the key people that made an impact on these young people are foster carers, professionals and mentors. Of course, all of the above are not separate, stand-alone factors, but points or processes interwoven into the lives of the young people, together with other events and people. For the care leavers Carl, Arthur, Saleem and Amelie it was the independence that came with leaving care post-sixteen. However, they attach a different meaning to this (then) newly found independence: Carl recalls that leaving the Children’s home made him “grow up”, Amelie found it tough: having lived for seven years with the same foster carer, who was “protective” and “direct”, she calls moving into independence “the biggest step” at the time.

However, with the challenges of independent living there are other aspects of it, such as choice as freedom, which came through as a particularly strong message in the interviews with Saleem and Arthur:

“I prefer living alone... You have your own key... more freedom...”

(Saleem)

“It was my choice to get up for work or stay in bed, or take a day off. I felt actually independent for a change... Independent living really gave me a lot of freedom that I had not had before... I was very happy about that”

(Arthur)

Both young men also talk about work as a one of the key experiences in the last couple of years. Going into work can be challenging for any sixteen year old. For Arthur, “work was a big thing”, as it made him “more responsible”; he does not deny how hard he found it however he also refers to it as “an opportunity” to do things he really wanted to do at that point - see friends that he left behind after moving, a girl he met not that long before that time and just “go where [he] wanted”. Arthur also admits at another point in an interview that it was that hard work at a factory that made him realise that he wants to go to university in order to improve his career prospects. Saleem’s view is not so different: he is aware that “in the times, when life is hard and that, and people can’t get jobs, you need to have education”.

Education is another key influence that comes through for several other young people. Education is an important part of a young person’s life, associated with opportunities for progression, self-fulfilment, mastery, friendships and other key aspects of human development. Education-related experiences can “make or

break” some young people; gaps in education set many vulnerable young people back in their development. Carl recalls losing a year of school at fifteen as having a big impact on his life at a time; at the same time, however, he is aware of the fact that it helped him “to leave the wrong crowd”. Similarly, Amelie recalls being kicked out of school for two months as a result of a traumatic event in the family and the impact it had on her. For Claire it was a slightly different experience: it is coming back to the local town after a long break from education (as a result of her having to move away) that has significance. Claire’s social worker referred her to an alternative education provider and

“Even though it wasn’t doing a lot for me at the time, it gave me that confidence... showed me something bigger... made me grow in confidence a lot”.

Claire associates being at the alternative education centre with deciding to go to university. Although it is impossible to make a direct link to Aimhigher here, she mentions elsewhere that she was attending sessions delivered by Aimhigher at that centre. At the same time Saleem is confident that not depending on Aimhigher he would “still go to college or university... [he] always wanted to do it”.

In fact, participation in Aimhigher activity is a part of another thread in the “key events and people” theme: for Stephanie, Rowena and Ajaz (all from care background) Aimhigher played a key role alongside some other activities that seem to have acted as a protective factor. Stephanie makes a link between her confidence and the events she took part in:

“Police cadets and training with the Army... And the Aimhigher experience... All these made me a lot more confident in what I can do”.

Similarly, for Ajaz, a sailing course that he was chosen for by his school made quite an impact; Aimhigher experience happened after that. Out of the three,

Rowena makes the strongest connection between Aimhigher and other meaningful experiences, namely her newly found streak: fundraising and voluntary work. In her narrative Rowena does not only link the two experiences (volunteering and Aimhigher) - she also sees the latter as a path to her increased confidence, especially when it comes to doing new things and meeting new people.

With regards to meeting, and relating to other people, Anita's story stands out as a sad portrayal of what some of the young people in care may be going through. Just as Amelie and other young people in the group, Anita had a life that consisted of endless moving, trying to adjust, make friends and 'be happy' everywhere she'd find herself but instead having to be defensive and lonely. Since engaging with Aimhigher, Anita moved several schools and towns; she talks of feeling "slightly abnormal" and sad; of not getting on with "normal" young people in all those new places. Anita found being outside the protective environment of the alternative school difficult, she felt that in new places, "everyone was better than me". She felt deep "inability to relate to people my age"; she recalls that "it was a struggle to have conversations with people". On the positive note, there was a very uplifting experience that was a turning point for Anita during that difficult time. This turning point came in a form of an audience reaction to a play that she wrote. Longing for acceptance and friendship, Anita recalls that

"... I felt an attitude about people, an attitude about the world... Everyone needs people... Just feeling human... I can't describe the feeling but it definitely changed me".

Anita's depiction offers an insight into how a turning point can represent an event that would only be noticeable to the young person. It is also extremely subjective. Anita's story is filled with the feeling of loneliness and being different to the "normal" people. It is, perhaps, then not totally surprising that her turning

point was about “feeling human”. Alongside this unique experience of belonging, Anita also describes her Aimhigher experience as having a “knock on effect” in the chain of events.

Overall, the older participants had more to say with regards to the chains of events and turning points in their lives. This can be explained by the fact that the time frame between their Aimhigher experience and the time of the interview was longer, and their ability to reflect greater. In fact, the six (younger) people (Jodie, Alexandra, Zamir, Thomas, Davina and Lorraine) who were interviewed within six to twelve months of their participation in Aimhigher activities could not name particular events that served as turning points.

However, out of the thirteen young people who spoke about turning points and key people in their lives, six participants mentioned Aimhigher as one of the key events in their lives. Interestingly, all six were aged 18-20 and all six were care leavers (Carl, Amelie, Stephen, Rowena, Anita, Stephanie). For each young person, Aimhigher experience took place in the background of multiple risk and protective factors. For some young people, it seems, it added to the cumulative effect of other protective factors, including support networks and other opportunities. As Anita describes it, “in a subtle way” Aimhigher “made it kind of explode”.

Equally, it can be specific personal characteristics that helped a young person get through severe adversity. For example, this relates to Rowena, a care leaver who has done very well academically despite an eighteen-month gap around the time of her GCSE exams. Surprisingly, perhaps, her source of motivation was

“... The fact that my teachers didn’t expect a lot of me and a lot of people didn’t. I don’t like failing so I was really determined to do it, to finish... I was staying up to four or five in the morning to do my coursework. And then wake up at six to go to school”.

Rowena’s case also highlights yet again the subjectivity of risk and protection. It can also be assumed that having highly educated sisters and foster carers who pushed her to do well at school played a certain role. The fact remains, however, that there are young people who display extraordinary strength despite their circumstances.

There is a danger, however, that as risk factors accumulate, the young person’s individual strengths may not be able to withstand this compounded negative effect. This brings the discussion back to the importance of appropriate, timely and consistent support for the young people. This support should come in the shape of support networks and education and training opportunities, delivered through the already existing channels, such as social services and education establishment.

Conclusion

Following the discussion around young people’s life trajectories and their experience of Aimhigher activities, this chapter brought these themes together under the resilience framework. Despite having to go through adversity and stress from an early age, the participants demonstrate attitudes and behaviours that point to the increased levels of resilience. The level and the type of this resilience-related change vary greatly amongst the participants; this is due to the unique nature of each young person’s ecology and interactions within. It is recognised that clustered factors and chains of events have a particularly powerful impact on individual resilience. This is supported by the young people’s

narratives about their journeys through care and education, presence or lack of support networks and opportunities. Young people's internal characteristics are also very important and form the internal resilience domain.

What the findings demonstrate, however, is that none of the resilience domains are static, including young people's individual attitudes, behaviours and temperament. The latter can change as a result of the young person's individual interpretations of and interactions with the external events, processes and people. While the complexity of understanding this process in terms of young person's development should not be underestimated, the study demonstrates that increasing the number of protective factors has potential to affect the young person's current experiences and future outcomes.

The participants' stories point to the fact that Aimhigher experiences played an important role in their development. The impact of their participation varied; while some young people called it "eye opening" and "life changing", others reported arguably less dramatic change, such as increase in social competence. The study data points to the conclusion that Aimhigher experience had the most effect where other protective factors were present, such as strong support networks and other opportunities, as well as individual characteristics of the participants. In the case of other young people, who reported fewer protective factors and processes, the change seemed less dramatic. At the same time, the subjectivity of meanings of risk and protection suggests that an increased confidence in a young person with complex learning needs is as powerful of an impact as another participant going to university.

The concept of turning points within resilience framework offers a further understanding of the role single factors can play within chains of events.

Interestingly, turning points vary greatly in young people's narratives, from reuniting with a long lost friend to working at a factory; a third of the sample named Aimhigher as a turning point in their lives. Combined with the discussion in Chapter 7, these findings point to increased levels of social competence, confidence, self-awareness, aspiration and sense of agency in the young people. All of these characteristics are linked with building resilience and more positive life outcomes.

9 Conclusion

This study has been constructed around the lives and experiences of nineteen young people. The young people's participation in Aimhigher activities acted as a starting point for this study, with the particular focus on the impact that this experience may have had on their developmental journeys. Both young people and professionals saw Aimhigher as a very positive experience. The bigger question, however, concerns young people's development in terms of resilience, and whether Aimhigher experience played any part in constructing their journeys of resilience (as stated in the research question). Indeed, the young people's accounts point to both patterns of vulnerability and patterns of resilience. It also transpires that Aimhigher played a mediating, or protective role by contributing to one or more resilience domains in young people's lives.

The findings around young people's resilience and the role of Aimhigher provide positive answers to the research questions posed at the start of this project. Despite the potential limitations of the study, such as convenience sampling, and the relative ambiguity of the time frame (with regards to the time 'before' Aimhigher participation), the key messages are consistent throughout the data.

Exploring the young people's Aimhigher experiences through the prism of the resilience framework has been helpful as it allowed the researcher to position Aimhigher participation within a broader context of adolescent development and

transitions. This finding does not only highlight the importance of such experiences in the young people's lives, but also the overall need for broader, holistic approaches to inform current provision for vulnerable groups. This research illuminates the discourse around the impact of Aimhigher initiative and serves and provides useful insights for future practice and policy.

Journeys of resilience

Young people's journeys of resilience emerged as a part of the process around answering the first research question, namely, whether there has been a change in the young people's life within a certain period of time. This was necessary in order to capture any processes that were present (unknown at the start of the exploration) and to then position Aimhigher within this process of change.

Using resilience approach as a background was also suited to the qualitative nature of the study; the emphasis was therefore on the aspects and trajectories of the young people's lives, as perceived and told by the participants. The young people's journeys through life, care and the education system are very different; each of them presents a unique combination of risk and protective factors, events, processes and meanings. This is an important message in itself, as generalisations are not always helpful in understanding the needs of young people and designing support that works. It is, however, possible to see certain themes emerge in their stories, which provide valuable insights for research, policy and practice.

One of the themes is the nature of the experience of being in the care system, which was shared by the thirteen participants in the sample. Eight young people also had to face serious challenges in mainstream education and were either

excluded or moved to AP. Each young person in the sample had to go through instability, be it moving schools or foster placements, having gaps in education or losing their friends and supportive adults. It is not surprising, perhaps, that for many, these adversities made an impact on their development and life chances. Their stories are a powerful illustration of what disadvantaged and vulnerable young people have to go through early in life.

However, the study also illuminates the positive aspects of their lives, such as having protective friendships and having a supportive and encouraging parent, foster carer, teacher or social worker. The participants spoke about their positive experiences, including the Aimhigher experience; their accounts also revealed their achievements and aspirations. This side of the story is still rather rarely heard when it comes to vulnerable young people, who are often portrayed as victims of their circumstances or out of control. Applying the resilience framework to this exploration allowed the researcher to focus equally on both risk and protective factors and processes and present a holistic view of young people's lives during their transitions through adolescence.

With regards to the first research question, the young people's stories indicate that a number of positive changes occurred within the time frame between before and after their Aimhigher participation. These changes were mapped across three resilience domains, including their family and foster placements, the wider environment, such as school, care system and leisure activities. There has also been a perceived change within the individual domain, in particular, in the areas of confidence, social competence and aspiration. The biggest change seems to have taken place for the nine older participants (eighteen to twenty years old). At the time of the interview, four of them were in HE, and the other five were in FE; this is statistically higher than the national LACYP participation. One of the reasons for this may be the fact that the young people had initially

been invited to take part in Aimhigher following a selection based on the professionals' judgement of their potential to go to university. Despite this potential caveat, this finding provides a valuable insight into the lives of care leavers of similar age, as there is not much knowledge about this age group. Most of the remaining participants also reported improved attainment, attendance and academic aspiration and more positive attitude towards schooling. Both findings are also valuable in light of the evidence of poorly supported transitions beyond KS4 (Wolf, 2011; Driscoll, 2012) and the recent developments around raising the school leaving age to eighteen (The Guardian, 2013b).

Of course, outcomes around academic achievement are extremely important, in particular, for LACYP groups and those in AP. Education is a key predictor of future life chances, including employment, financial stability, access to quality healthcare and other resources. However, this study argues that this outcome is, in fact, a part of a bigger change in the young people and their lives. Mapped across several resilience domains, it includes the way the young people see themselves and their environment and the way they construct their interactions. This view is supported by the young people's descriptions and comparisons of themselves in terms of their attitudes, capabilities and behaviours at the time of 'before' and 'after' their Aimhigher experience. It is important to note, however, that the dynamic nature of resilience also implies that the 'snapshot' of positive change is not static. In other words, the future of the participants' resilience depends on the continuous interplay of all the contributing elements across the three resilience domains. This points to the need for further, ongoing support for the young people (Driscoll, 2012), which should include opportunities similar to Aimhigher.

This study also highlights the emotional suffering that the young people experience as a result of cumulative adversity. This finding echoes the key messages of the Young Minds charity (2010, 2012), which state that almost half of all LACYP population suffers from a mental health disorder. The impact of emotional and mental health on other aspects of the young people's lives, including their relationships, their attainment and their perception of themselves is currently very much underestimated (Scottish Executive, 2007; Young Minds, 2010; NSPCC, 2011; Young Minds, 2012). Poor (or, it can be argued, poorly supported) emotional and mental wellbeing is a serious stress factor, linked to other risk and resilience domains and thus contributing to the cumulative effect of risk.

Understanding of cumulative effects of risk and protection is crucial to the concept of resilience. These are created by the interactions of clusters and chains of events, sometimes producing unexpected results and thus making every child's journey unique in the background of statistics-based trends and expectations. Alongside chains of events, certain events are recognised as turning points that create powerful change in one's life trajectory. The young people in this study provide examples of both. Their transitions through adolescence, the care and the education system are interrupted, or enhanced by certain events that have a particularly powerful meaning for them. These turning points are very different, varying from working at a factory to feeling accepted (for the first time). Developmental opportunities, including the Aimhigher experience, also feature as meaningful turning points. This brings the discussion to research questions two and three, namely, the impact of Aimhigher participation and its contribution to resilient patterns.

Aimhigher experience

Understanding the impact of Aimhigher on the young people's development is important for several reasons. On one hand, despite the Aimhigher initiative ceasing its existence in 2011, a large part of its activity has been since maintained as a part of the universities' fair access arrangements (Atherton, 2012; Grove, 2012). Moreover, it seems that in order to continue the work around widening access a similar initiative may be emerging soon, although, perhaps, with less financial resource available (Grove, 2013; Times Higher, 2013). There is, therefore a real need to learn from the Aimhigher practice with a view to inform the current fair access provision and future initiatives. On the other hand, scientific explorations of similar initiatives are rare, as most of them require evaluation-based reports to inform the funders. A cross-disciplinary approach of sociological, psychological and educational theory helped illuminate the mechanisms that provided the young people with a powerful developmental opportunity. There are also very few explorations of similar projects in terms of fostering resilience. In the background of the increasing interest in operationalising resilience (Schofield and Beek, 2005), this study provides valuable insights for current and future practice, including education and social services.

As the findings demonstrate, Aimhigher contributed to promoting academic-related outcomes amongst most of the participants. Both young people's and practitioners' accounts point to the strength-based 'everybody can achieve' approach at the heart of Aimhigher interventions. Most young people spoke of increased interest in schooling and post-compulsory progression; some reported increased attendance and attainment. In this respect, the evidence suggests that Aimhigher initiative did indeed fulfil its policy remit (increased educational aspiration and attainment, which potentially lead to increased participation in HE).

At the same time, the study helped to draw attention to what can be presented as the unintended or undefined outcomes of participation in Aimhigher activity (Parlett and Hamilton, 1987; Fullan, 1991; Webb and Vulliamy, 2004), namely, positive developments across other resilience domains. These include increased social and emotional competence, self-awareness and self-confidence of the participants. Chapter 7 illustrates how these characteristics are interlinked with the process of identity transformation, which echoes the discussion around learner identity in Aimhigher-related studies conducted by Hatt, Baxter and Tate (2008; 2009; see also Bloomer and Hodgkinson, 2000). Furthermore, Vygotsky's concept of *zone of proximal development* and Csikszentmihalyi's notion of *flow* provide a further insight in understanding the process of engaging young people in meaningful activities and building their resilience.

Bringing together the socio-psychological model of resilience and education theory was particularly helpful in view of general absence of the theoretical development around educational experiences of children in care (Berridge, 2007). The study provides an example of how interdisciplinary research can illuminate certain factors and the connections between the latter - an area that could be explored further in future research. Both concepts also have a shared element of appropriate challenge, which can also be understood as managed risk, instrumental in developing adaptation and resilience. Drawing on these theories provides an explanation of how resilience can occur as a result of activities that are developmental and meaningful to the young people. Evidence also suggests that engaging the participants in elements of social and experiential learning helps the young people develop sense of agency, and relational agency in particular, which also attributes to building resilience (Edwards and McKenzie, 2005).

Aimhigher played an instrumental role in helping the participants develop resilient patterns. On the operational level, this was achieved by utilising the strength-based model of interaction, which focused on the development of skills and competences in a nurturing environment. The latter encompassed providing the learners with an appropriate level of challenge, relevant to the young person's disposition, supported by staff and mentors. The elements of the Aimhigher activity bear resemblance to other extra-curricular activities, including arts events, sports and outdoor pursuits, as discussed in Chapter 7. At the same time, both young people and professionals interviewed for this study describe Aimhigher as "different" (from their usual environment, such as school). This may be due to a mixture of factors, such as a positive, aspirational nature of the activities and its extracurricular format; engaging in an appropriately set challenge in a social environment; and an opportunity to build positive relationships with supportive staff, students and peers.

Therefore, on one hand, there are opportunities that can be equally as developmental for the young people, as Aimhigher experience. On the other hand, however, it is clear that the young people do not get to access to such opportunities often enough; this is a disappointing finding, as the importance of being exposed to extra-curricular activities has been highlighted in research for many years (Gilligan, 2000; Jackson and Sachdev, 2000). Most of the young people in the study referred to such experiences as turning points and key events in their lives. The study also points to the protective and risk-mediating nature of such activities and experiences in building and supporting resilient patterns.

Of course, the presence of other protective factors and processes in the participants' lives should not be underestimated. This said, there is clear evidence that interventions with characteristics similar to Aimhigher have tremendous potential in developing young people's skills and contributing to

their resilience. These interventions should be available both within and outside the structured environment. In this regard, two programmes come to mind. Firstly, the Achievement for All programme, currently running in several schools in England, is reported to be very successful in improving the outcomes for students with SEN and those eligible for FSM (Humphrey and Squires, 2011; Achievement for All, 2013). The success of the initiative has been attributed to flexibility and child-centred approach, which included high expectations from staff, involvement of parents and carers (Lamb, 2011). This was supported by appropriate targeting and effective assessment strategies (Humphreys and Squires, 2011). Similarly, the National Citizen Service programme available to young people outside curriculum bear resemblance to Aimhigher. Namely, the focus on developing young people's skills through exciting activities and further use of these new strengths in the community. As highlighted in the interim report by Clery et al. (2012), the model at the basis of the programme combines the underlying principles skill development, transition to adulthood and contributing to community cohesion.

The discussion around the Aimhigher initiative (as it existed in 2004-2011) illustrates the importance of effective targeting strategies. Alignment of policy and clear understanding of shared agendas is crucial for the successful support provision for disadvantaged and hard-to-reach groups. Some good practice of policy and practice alignment between Aimhigher partnerships and LAs has been identified (Hurrell, 2010; University of Leicester, 2011). However, as Chapter 3 illustrates, many young people eligible for Aimhigher participation fell through the targeting 'net', including children in care and pupils with with SEN and SpLD. This occurred due to the lack of clear targeting guidelines, insufficient communication and confusions around eligibility. Interestingly, complexities around targeting also featured for other initiatives (independent of Aimhigher). For example, targeting SEN students for the Achievement for All was sometimes

problematic as some disengaged students found themselves on and off the cohort (Humphreys and Squires, 2011). Additionally, academic achievement (at a point in time) and potential to enter HE are not only subjective, but also not necessarily true indicators of pupils' potential. The latter has been demonstrated in this study (Chapter 3) and, similarly, reports from other initiatives (for example, Achievement for All, 2013).

Messages for practice and policy

The study offers insights that are useful for both policy and practice. With regards to the Aimhigher's successor and the current provision that comes under the WP banner; as well as broader channels of support for vulnerable young people, such as social and youth services, schools, and other statutory and voluntary organisations. Similarly, this research highlights how policy does not necessarily translate into practice (for example, around entitlement, eligibility and access to opportunities; educational achievement of vulnerable groups; gaps around emotional wellbeing of young people; inconsistencies in multiagency activity). On a broader level, the study also raised questions around the widening participation versus widening access agenda, and the driving forces behind it.

It is important to say here, that the study has also highlighted some good practice, both in relation to Aimhigher and other services. This includes partnership approach and collaborative provision; Aimhigher practitioners' positive and supportive approaches; activity design; and involving current undergraduates as role models. Likewise, the young people's accounts point to examples of young people feeling supported by social workers and teachers; accessing opportunities; receiving support and care from their foster carers.

Overall, the participants' accounts highlight two consistent trends in their lives: the importance of support networks and opportunities, and, equally, evident lack thereof. As Chapter 6 and 8 demonstrate, the young people who performed the most across several resilience domains, such as confidence, sense of agency, emotionality, and academic achievement, had the support and encouragement of people close to them. Similarly, the opportunities they were exposed to mattered greatly and were identified as turning points and key events in the participants' lives. However, the study clearly demonstrates that these opportunities are scarce and far from all young people are supported effectively in their development.

The evidence of this uneven provision goes against the key policy messages around vulnerable young people. Indeed, there were positive developments under the Labour Government, that put looked after children on the map of policy and practice. This includes legislation such as The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2002, the updated Children Act (2004) and the Every Child Matters agenda (2004), followed by the Care Matters: Time for Change (2007). These documents highlighted the issues around the education of children in care, reinforced the importance of stable and appropriately matched foster placements and the role of social workers.

Despite these measures, however, it seems that things are not getting better for the majority of the children in care (The Who Cares Trust, 2013). They are still behind the rest of the child population in compulsory and post-compulsory education and employment opportunities. They still move between placements; they still have a higher risk of being involved in crime or having a child in their teens. This inequality comes through in the stories of the young people in this study (Chapters 6 and 8). Some care leavers in the study recall how they were constantly moving placements, which resulted in gaps in education at the crucial

time of GSCE exams. They also speak of not hearing from their social worker for months. Although this is not representative of every young person in the study, this was the reality for some. It is clear, then, that despite the much more developed evidence base highlighting the significance of education for vulnerable young people, practice has not kept pace in a consistent manner.

Similarly, the interview data points to a lack of support within the education environment. This is equally true for the participants in and outside of the care system. As discussed in Chapter 6, several young people reported that the teachers “did not expect too much”; only a few were able to name a member of staff at their school as a source of support and encouragement. The analysis of the participants’ trajectories also reveals how an independent factor (death of a family member, or having to move) can have a devastating effect on the child’s behaviour and attitudes at school and result in exclusion.

In addition to the reported lack of support from teaching and social service professionals, the theme that comes through is the lack of IAG that would inform the young people of their options. In particular, this relates to their education and training opportunities, including pathways and resources available to them. As outlined in Chapter 7, several young people in the study mentioned that they received more support and information from Aimhigher than from other professionals, which provides valuable evidence to the research question on the role of Aimhigher. This is a very important finding, as - while it is positive that Aimhigher was able to support these young people - it highlights the lack of IAG provision, which contributes further into the poor education, training and employment outcomes of vulnerable young people. The study also points to powerful impact of supporting the young people with the correct timely information, including post-compulsory options, FE and HE and the funding entitlement. Accounts of contact with Aimhigher, detailed in Chapter 7, point to

the conclusion that delivery of appropriate IAG, combined with a strength-based approach have a positive effect not just on the young people's awareness, but also on their aspiration and motivation to do better in school.

Another theme running through the stories of young people and practitioners is the effect of the young people's interactions on their emotional and mental wellbeing, discussed in Chapter 6. Most of them have already come into care and alternative education with a 'baggage' of experiencing adversity, trauma, maltreatment and stigmatisation. The young people that enter the system are already at higher risk of vulnerability and susceptibility to negative outcomes. Any additional trauma places them at even higher risk, which is illustrated in the young people's reflections on their experiences in care and education system. Poor mental health and emotional wellbeing can be a very powerful risk factor in understanding of the child's resilience. At the same time, improving the young people's life experiences can have an equally profound positive effect on their inner and outer worlds, thus reversing the negative effect and contributing to their resilience. This connection is clearly demonstrated in the young people's descriptions of their perceived selves, which, in turn, have a much wider effect on their interactions with their environments.

These findings call for further (and urgent) improvements in the provision of statutory care and support that is available to the vulnerable young people. The need for the holistic approach to the development and wellbeing of the children and young people today is evident. The language around current experiences and future outcomes should also be addressed, as focusing on the young people's experiences today will take care of the future outcomes. Aspects of the young people's lives as schooling, foster care, the importance of family and peer networks or lack thereof, being able to take part in developmental activities are what constitutes the young people's everyday lives; this needs to be

acknowledged. Similarly, as the resilience approach demonstrates, not all vulnerable young people have poor life outcomes; however, focusing on building protective factors and experiences seems to produce more concrete results in terms of positive development. Using Aimhigher provision as an example, these could include providing opportunities for experiential and social learning that boost self awareness and social competence; appropriate risk and challenge that boost confidence; positive environments and role models that increase motivation and promote aspiration.

Building frameworks that promote protective factors and processes into existing provision, or utilising the resilience approach in designing new interventions offers a possible solution to meeting the young people's needs in a holistic, child-centred way (Schofield and Beek, 2005). This includes not only practitioners having the tools to see the 'whole picture' of the young person's life trajectory, but equally, the knowledge and the training to build the understanding of the cumulative impact of stress and protection. This knowledge should be used to inform the current practices and interventions in order to foster resilience in vulnerable young people, by providing the external protective and mediating factors, with a view to strengthen the individual domains. It seems that although the activities delivered by Aimhigher have elements corresponding with the resilience framework, the link has not formally been established; the same can be said about similar initiatives such as Achievement for All and NC.

It can be argued therefore that although the link to resilience approach can be traced in the Aimhigher interventions and their impact, it was more of an unintended outcome, rather than a planned approach. Making the link between existing practice and the resilience approach more explicit may be beneficial. This measure may not necessarily require a vast volume of new resources, as the resilience framework presents a shift in thinking about the young people, rather

than a drastic measure that requires extra resource. Provision of protective factors involves steps that governments have already committed to on policy level, such as appropriately matched stable foster placements; consistent support from social services, including regular contact, correct and timely advice and guidance; support, encouragement and strength-based approach from other professionals, including teaching staff and the wider teams around the child (DfE, 2012).

The resilience approach to the young people's development can be strengthened further by improving the links between agencies that are equally responsible for the wellbeing and development of a person has been placed in their 'care' by being looked after, excluded, having complex needs. It has been repeatedly recognised that there is lack of mutual awareness between strands of support, such as social services and education staff (CAMHS, 2008). There is also evidence that points to the challenges around new schemes and initiatives being recognised and thus hindering multi-agency collaborations (Walker and Donaldson, 2010). This was also supported by the discussion in Chapter 3 around partnership work between Aimhigher and local authorities, whereby the alignment of the policy agendas and frameworks did not happen until 2010. At the same time, the accounts of the interviewed practitioners demonstrate that the collaboration and the young people would benefit greatly from a more mindful and joined-up multiagency approach across both policy and practice.

It can be suggested, therefore, that there is still potential for more cohesive multi-agency collaborations, which are beneficial to the vulnerable young people. Additionally, more training is needed around the child-centred approach and understanding child development holistically (CAMHS, 2008). Groups that could benefit include the range of individuals and services that constitute the environment around the vulnerable young person, including families and foster

carers, social workers, teachers, mentors and other professionals. Similarly, provision should be focused on removing the barriers to young people's participation in opportunities such as Aimhigher that present themselves as resilience-building factors; as well as creating more opportunities for them. This can also be achieved through more efficient multi agency collaborations. This is not, of course, a new message. As the study demonstrates, so far many young people face barriers and obstacles that hinder their participation in developmental provision. Examples include a careleaver who could not take up opportunities as she was catching up with school after a long gap in education; inefficient targeting based on subjective judgment of potential; lack of awareness amongst staff that could promote these opportunities.

Of course, this discussion is taking place in the background of what is suspected to be a 'triple dip recession' (BBC, 2013; Stewart, 2013). It can be argued, that in the climate of government cutbacks on public services making a plea for more public service provision may prove to be a challenge. At the same time, it is worth bearing in mind that the numbers of the looked after children have risen dramatically and hit "a fifteen-year high" in 2012 (DfE, 2012; Pemberton, 2012). The impact of cutting back public services is already becoming apparent, with vulnerable young people getting far from a fair deal from the government, with ever more limited access to already scarce opportunities (Halstead, 2012; NCAS, 2012; NCVYS, 2013). Similarly, evidence suggests that more and more families are sinking into poverty as a result of further policy changes (Bushe, Kenway and Aldridge, 2013), placing further strain on family relationships and potentially placing more young people on the edge of care. Similarly, many young people living independently found themselves living below the minimum income standard (Schmueker, 2013).

It also important to recognise positive trends in policy and pockets of good practice that has emerged during and since the closure of Aimhigher (Cabinet Office, 2013). Recent positive developments include the Children and Families Bill 2013, which improves support provision for LACYP and changes the way the education system supports pupils with a range of complex needs (DfE, 2013). Specifically, reinforcing the status of VSHs and the support available through the Pupil Premium for LACYP, SEN and FSM pupils are positive and have potential to provide targeted and much needed support to these groups (DfE, 2013f).

In practice, programmes like Achievement for All (DfE, 2011c) present a more holistic approach to supporting learners with SEN, SpLD and in receipt of FSM. The initiative incorporates elements of a strength-based model by provides a targeted programme of work for underachieving pupils, based on pastoral care; it also includes 'structured' meetings with parents and carers (Humphrey and Squires, 2011; Vasagar, 2011). The latter is particularly valuable as it contributes to the strengthening of support networks around the child. According to the recent information, there is evidence of not just narrowing, but closing the achievement gap for disadvantaged children who took part in this project (Achievement for All, 2013). It is important to point out, that complexities around targeting have not been totally eliminated (Humphrey and Squires, 2013), and should be treated with great care to make sure all eligible children benefit.

Similarly, the latest developments around bringing alternative and mainstream provision closer together suggest that these changes can improve young people's access to extra-curricular activities (Taylor, 2012). A positive example of engaging young people outside the compulsory education system is the multi-tiered framework of activity offered to adolescents through the National Citizen Service (Clery et al., 2012). The initiative, described as "the Government's

flagship initiatives for building a bigger, stronger society” (NatCen Social Research, 2013), echoes the key themes explored in this study, in particular, developing self-efficacy through meaningful participation and relational agency. Another example of engaging pupils in after-school activities is the Myplace programme, launched in 2008 and aimed at supporting local provision in some of the most deprived areas (DfE, 2011d). With government funding ceasing to exist in April 2013, it is important that the support is maintained through other channels, for example, the Big Lottery Fund (DfE, 2013d).

An important element of these examples of good practice is young people’s achievements. Highlighting the participants’ achievements promotes a child-centred holistic approach and contributes to youth empowerment. Another way to empower young people is to involve them in the design and delivery of the provision. Being a part of the decisions made about their care or education is an inseparable part of providing the young people with a chance to participate in practice and policy in a meaningful way. For looked after young people this right can be traced to the 1989 Children Act (1989). Young people can be involved in a number of ways, at the level of practice, policy and research. Although this practice is becoming more common, there is room for improvement (Combe, 2002; DfE, 2011b; 2012g). These messages correspond with the accounts of the young people and professionals in this study, who express clearly what promotes and what inhibits their development. There is evidence of continuing work in this area, for example, the developments carried out as a part of the Positive for Youth Government agenda. The latter includes a range of local and national youth participation services delivered under the Youth Voice contract between DfE and BYC (BYC, 2013). Similar to the Myplace initiative, there is an issue of funding uncertainty in 2013 (BYC, 2013).

In the background of financial uncertainty, however, it is important to identify and utilise currently existing provision and make sure that it is organised in the most effective way in terms of supporting vulnerable young people. Bringing the argument back to Aimhigher, one mustn't forget the current fair access activity run by the HE and FE providers, which, it can be argued, in many ways inherited the principles of Aimhigher operation (OFFA, 2013). The outreach activity under the fair access 'banner', discussed in Chapter 3, focuses on providing aspirational opportunities to groups underrepresented in HE, including care leavers, students with disability and those from lower socio-economic groups. It is important that this activity is underpinned by the good practice developed by the Aimhigher and other initiatives; at the same time, real improvements can be made around defining and understanding desirable outcomes, measuring success and research-based practice; and realistic understanding of the challenges (for example, external barriers that impede young people's participation). It is also currently unclear the fair access activity is more effective than Aimhigher in targeting all eligible groups and providing them with a meaningful activity.

"Everybody's business" (CAMHS, 2008)

Of course, it is important to accept, that ensuring cohesive, efficient and child-centred provision around children most vulnerable is challenging. However, it is equally necessary and urgent. Despite the recent developments around improving experiences and outcomes of young people with complex needs, changes in the landscape of public services have set back this progress. The decrease in public spending has coincided with record high numbers of children in care. Similarly, cutting and rearranging funding streams had an effect on the support for children with complex needs. The discussion points to the fact that some services are being cut and reintroduced, such as Aimhigher (Attwood, 2010b; Grove, 2013) and impartial careers advice in schools (Cabinet Office, 2013). Similarly, there is uncertainty around continuation (or termination) of

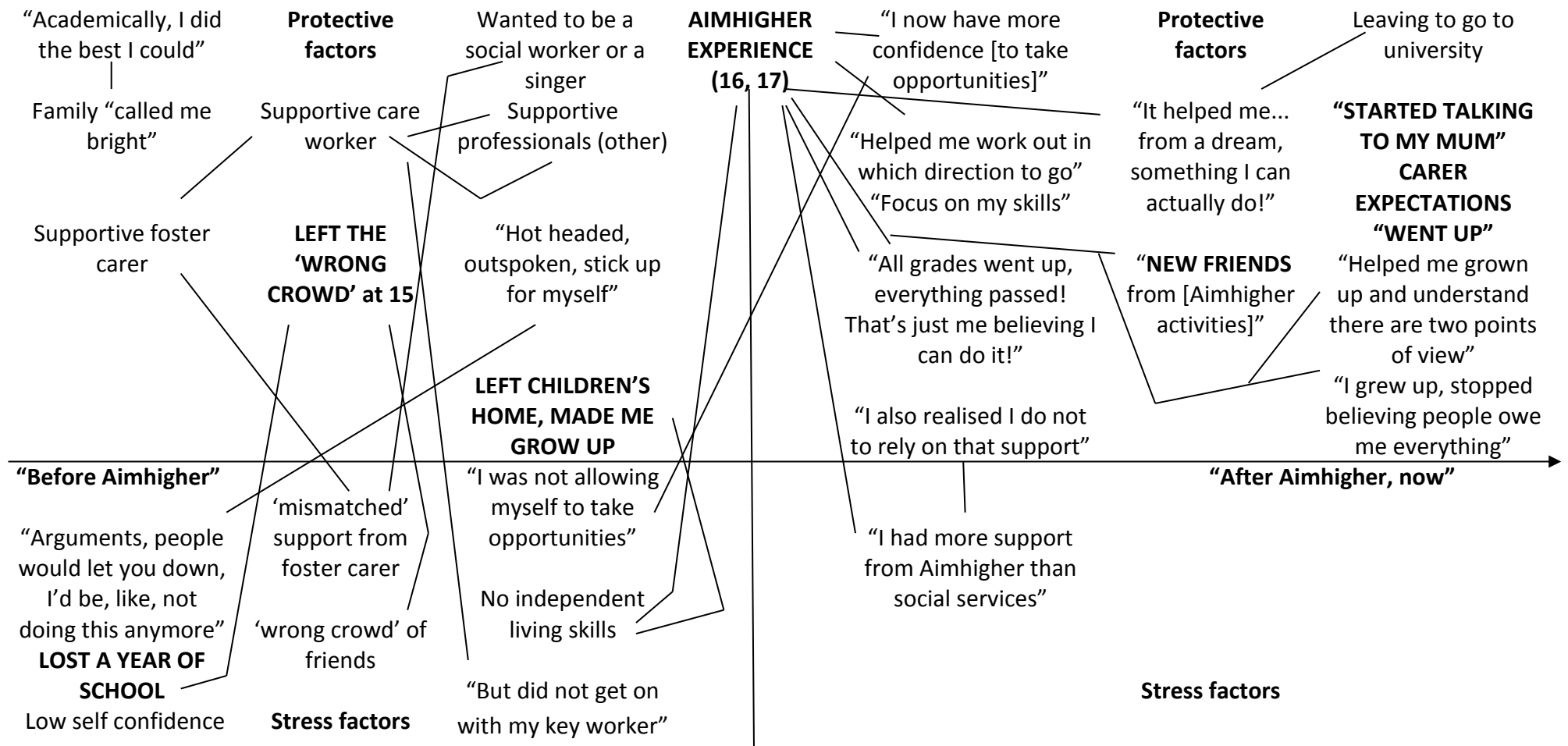
funding around such projects as Myplace and the Youth Voice (BYC, 2013; DfE 2013d).

In this regard, one should not underestimate the strength of the relationship between large-scale social, economic and political processes and real life experiences of children failed by the care and the education system, which is clearly demonstrated by the young people's stories in this study. The connection of social structures and individual lives makes supporting the vulnerable child "everybody's business" (CAMHS, 2008). In the background of the scarce resources and public cuts, the children of today are the adults of tomorrow. The route to improving young people's experiences and outcomes around health and wellbeing, education, employment and thus supporting them in developing agency and citizenship is to invest resource into their development. These resources can manifest through carers, professionals and volunteers, who have the appropriate skills and enthusiasm to empower the young people. It seems appropriate to conclude this message with the words of Samantha, a teacher in an alternative education unit:

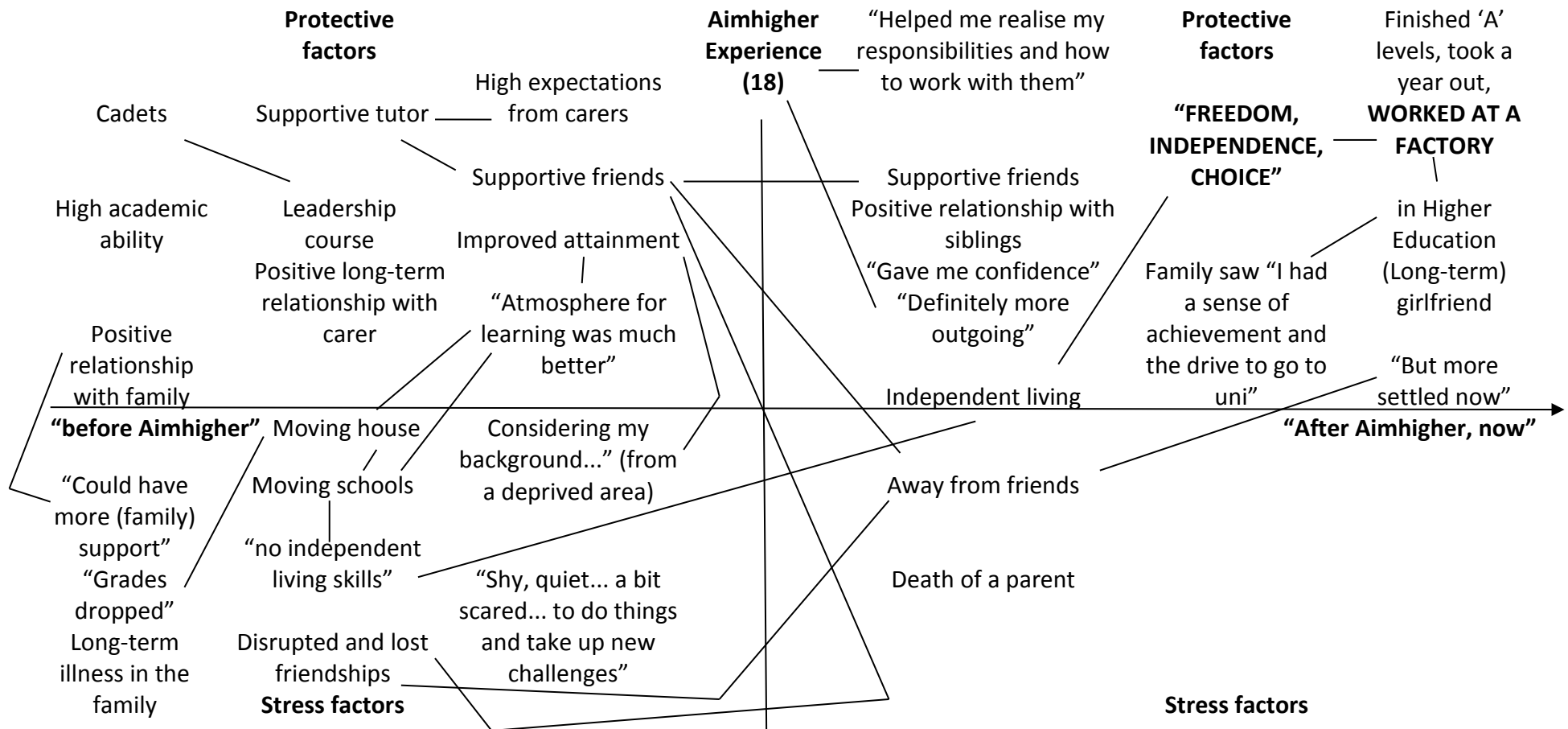
"Whoever thought up the idea of Aimhigher, it was a good idea. And much that I'm tempted to be a Tory, what are they doing? They are not looking long term. We've got all these short term things, we'll cut money here, cut money here, but crickey, won't it cost a lot of money in the long term?"

Appendices

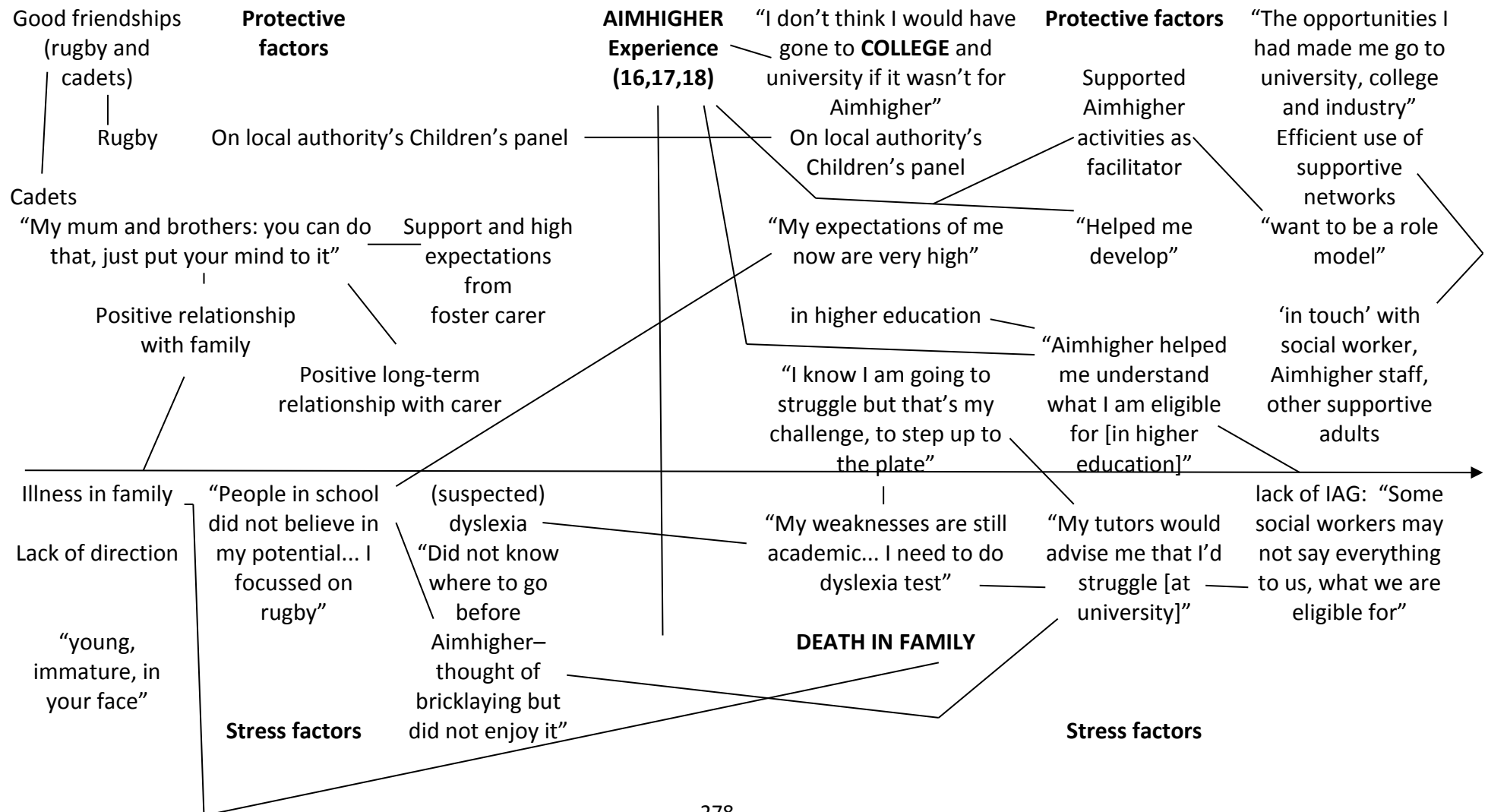
Appendix 1 (continued). Life trajectory maps. No1 Carl, 19, care leaver



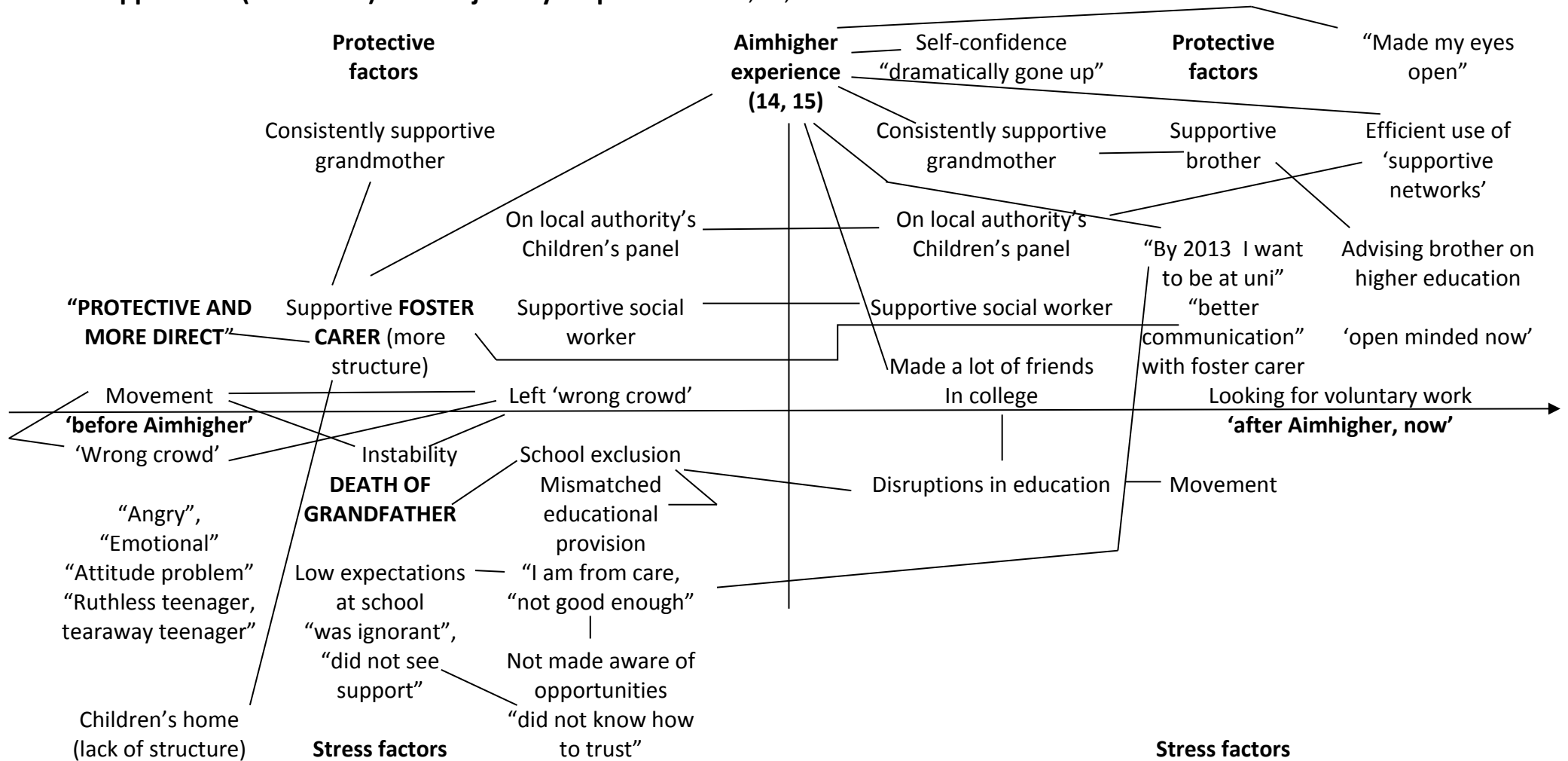
Appendix 1 (continued). Life trajectory maps. No2 Arthur, 20, care leaver



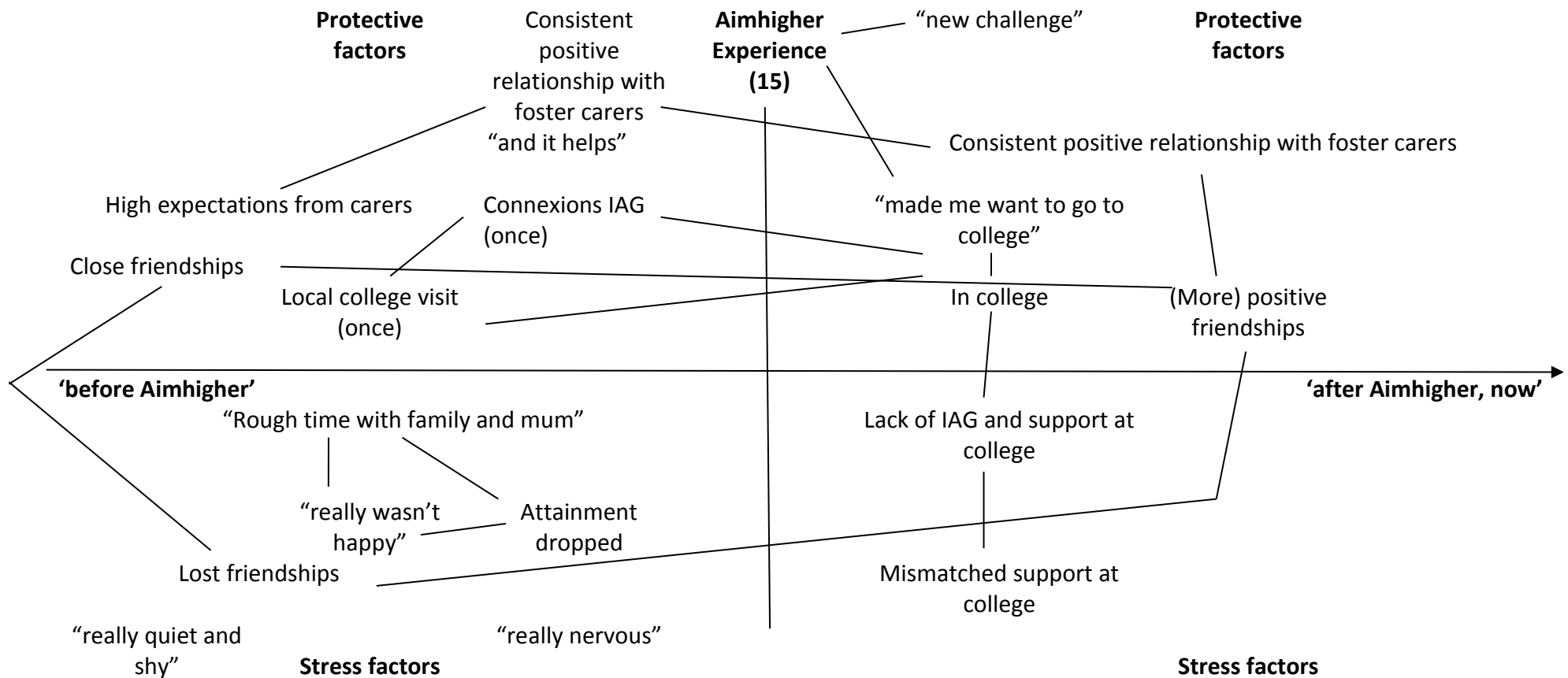
Appendix 1 (continued). Life trajectory maps. No3 Stephen, 19, care leaver



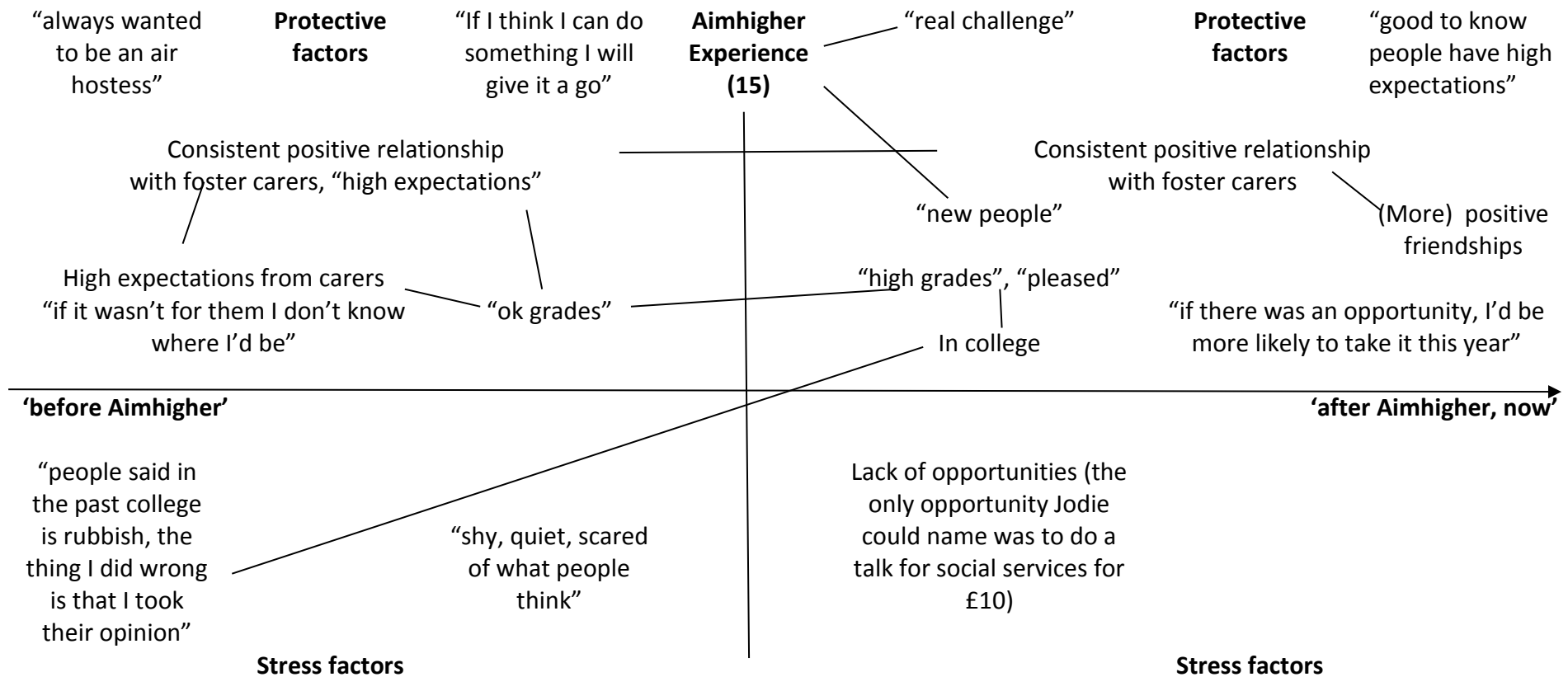
Appendix 1 (continued). Life trajectory maps. No4 Amelie, 18, care leaver



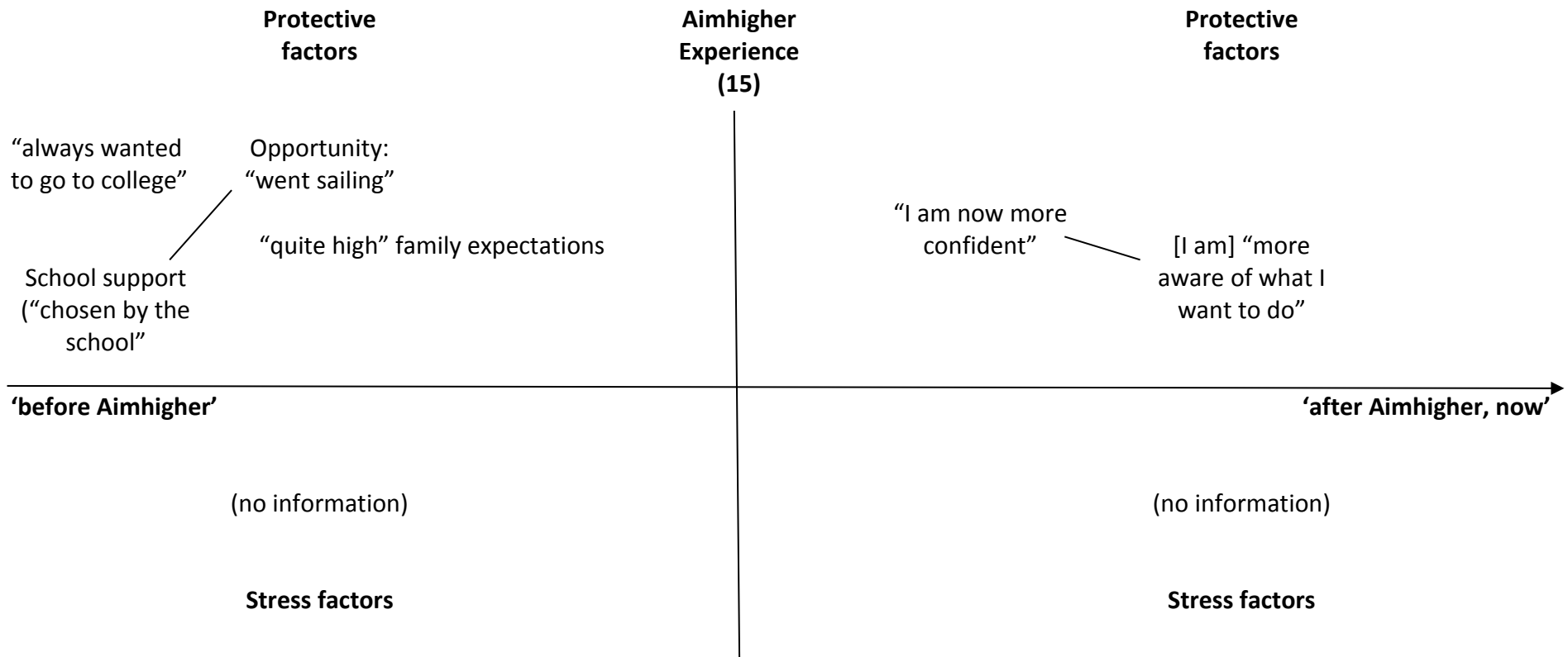
Appendix 1 (continued). Life trajectory maps. No5 Alexandra, 16, in foster care



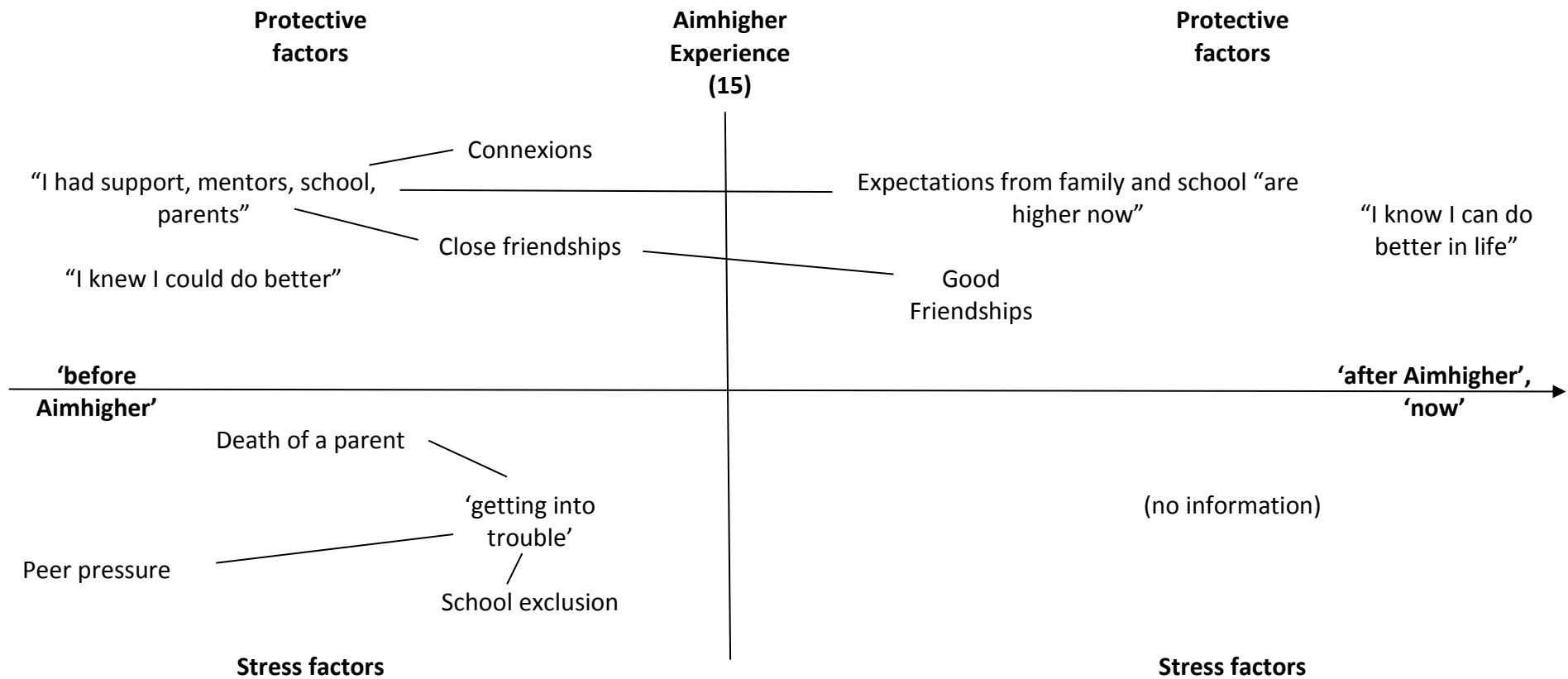
Appendix 1 (continued). Life trajectory maps. No6 Jodie, 17, in foster care



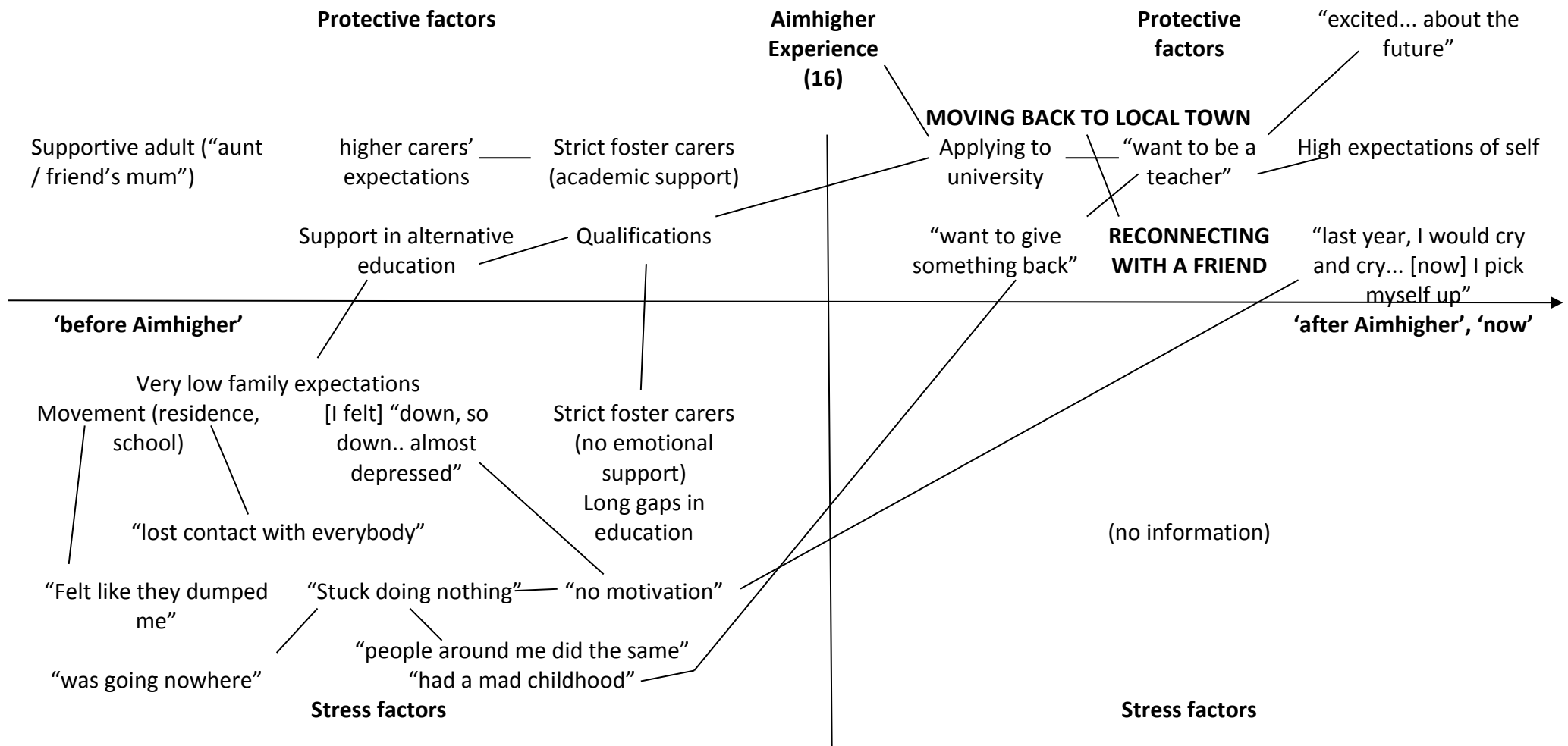
Appendix 1 (continued). Life trajectory maps. No7 Ajaz, 15, in foster care



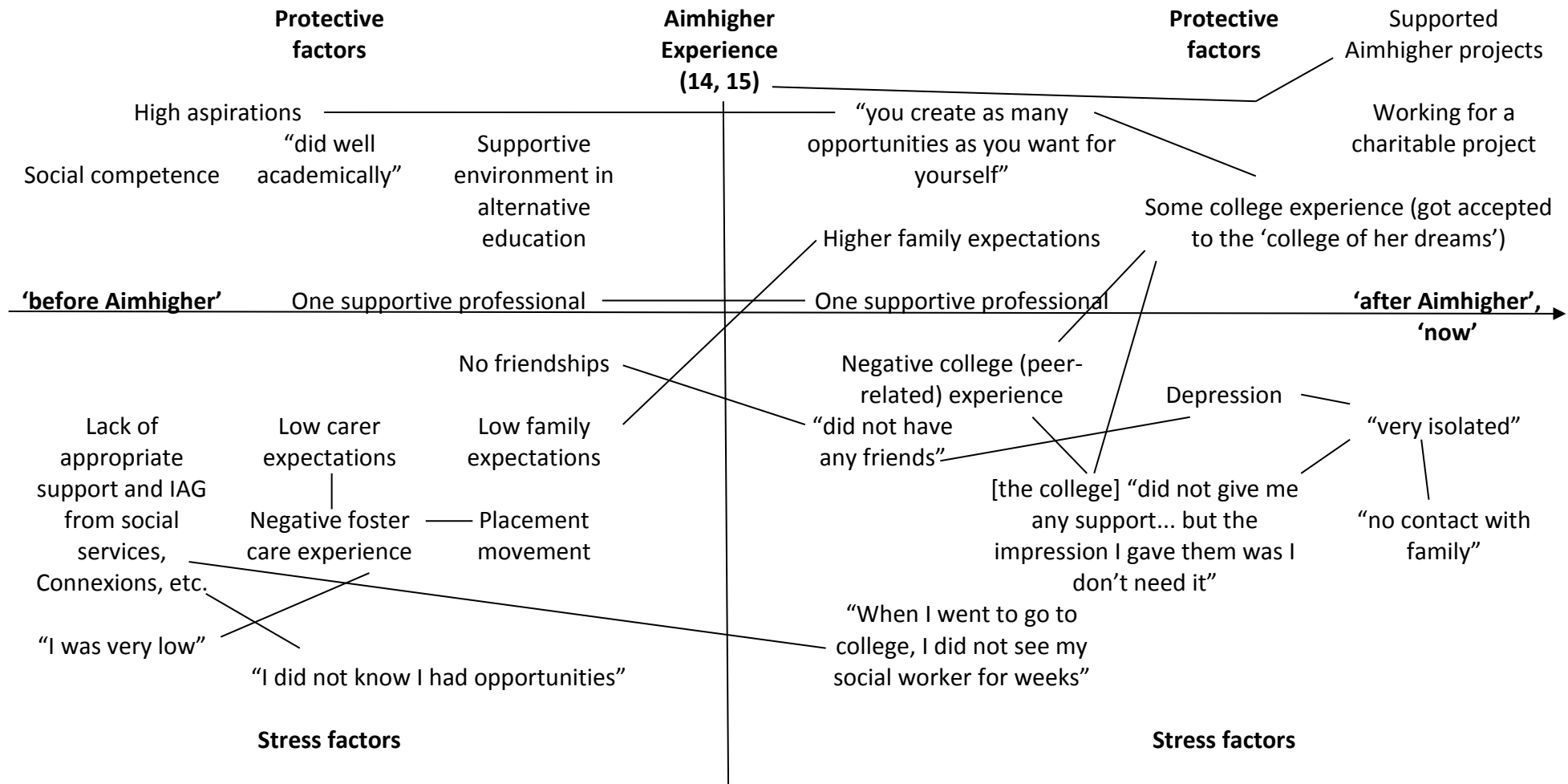
Appendix 1 (continued). Life trajectory maps. No8 Femi, 16, history of school exclusion (in mainstream education at time of interview)



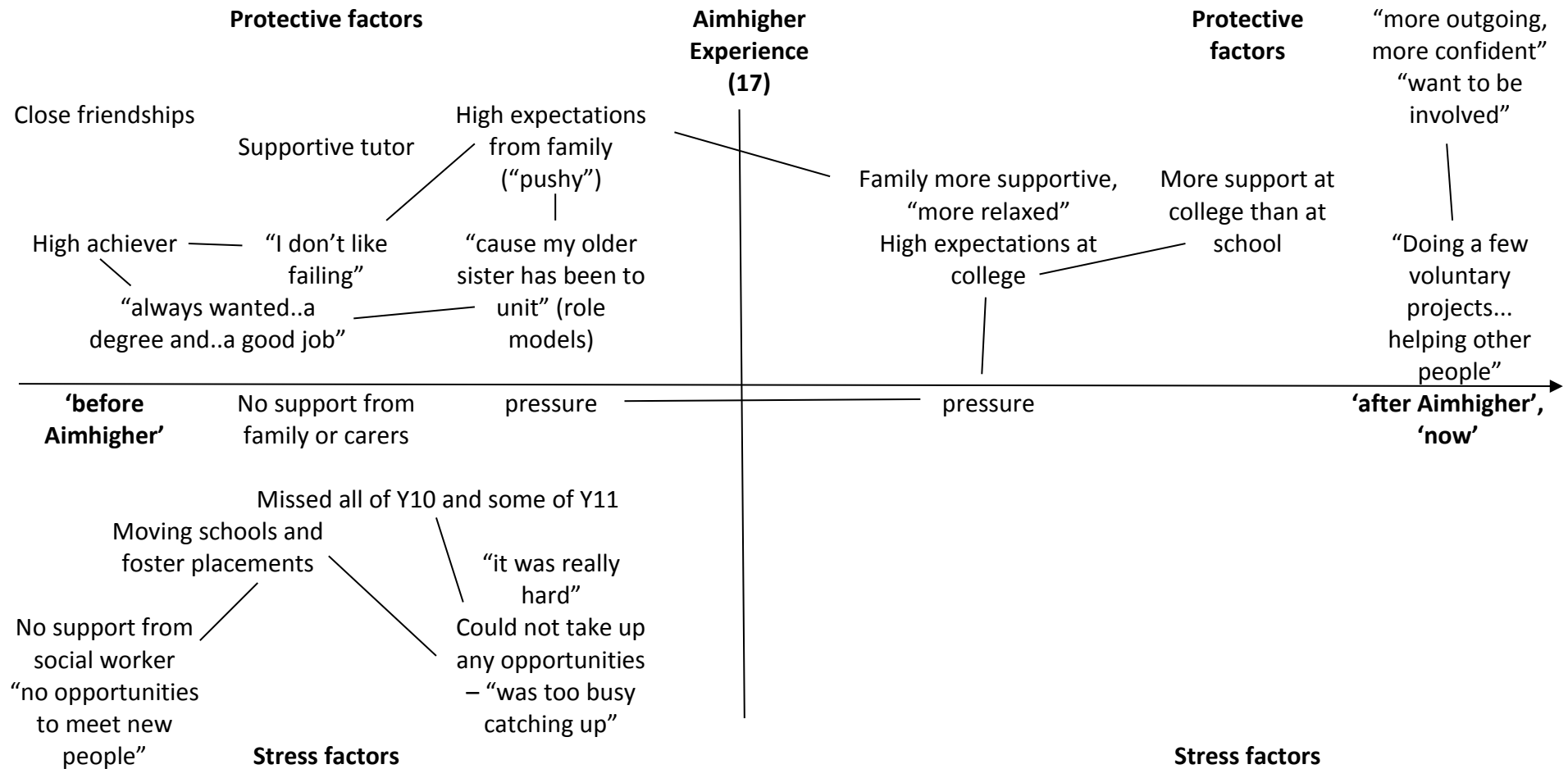
Appendix 1 (continued). Life trajectory maps. No9 Claire, 18, care leaver, history of alternative education



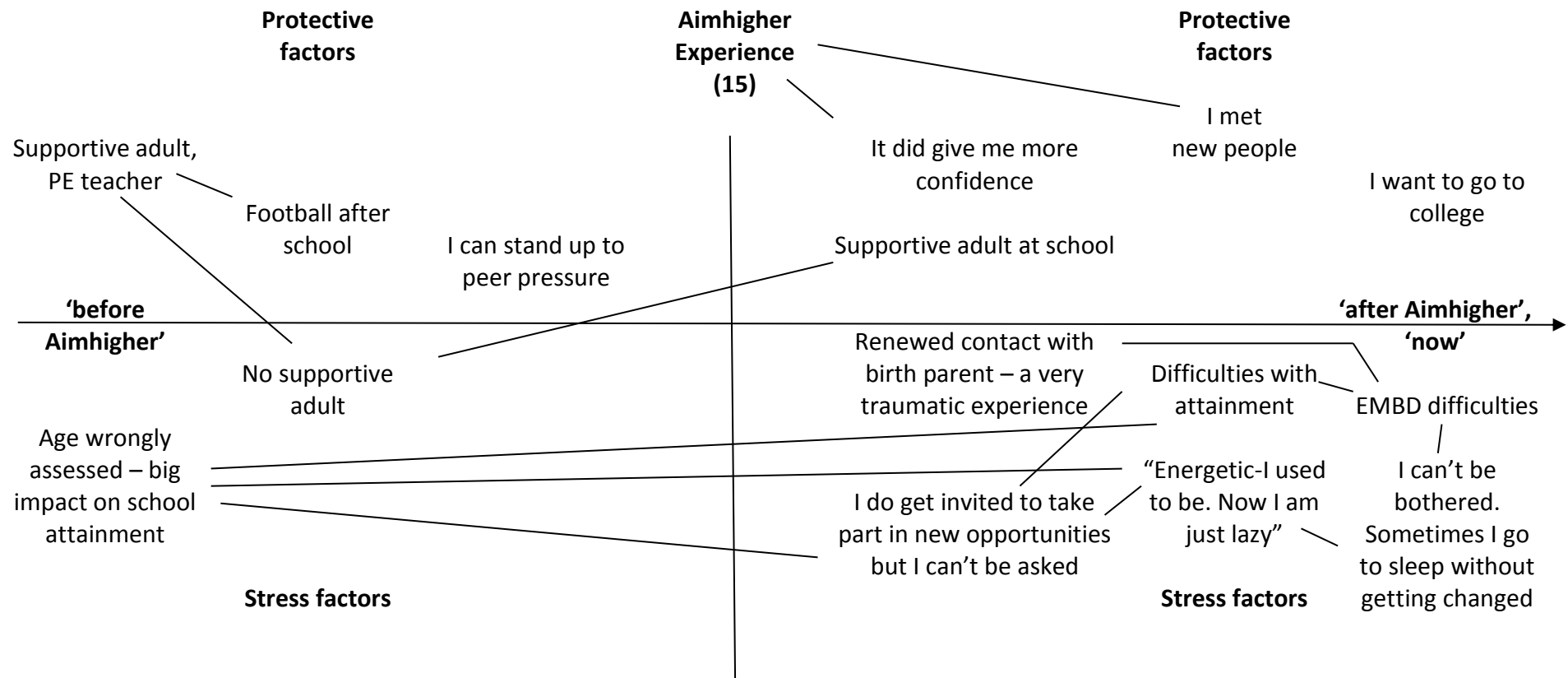
Appendix 1 (continued). Life trajectory maps. No10 Anita, 17, care leaver, history of alternative education



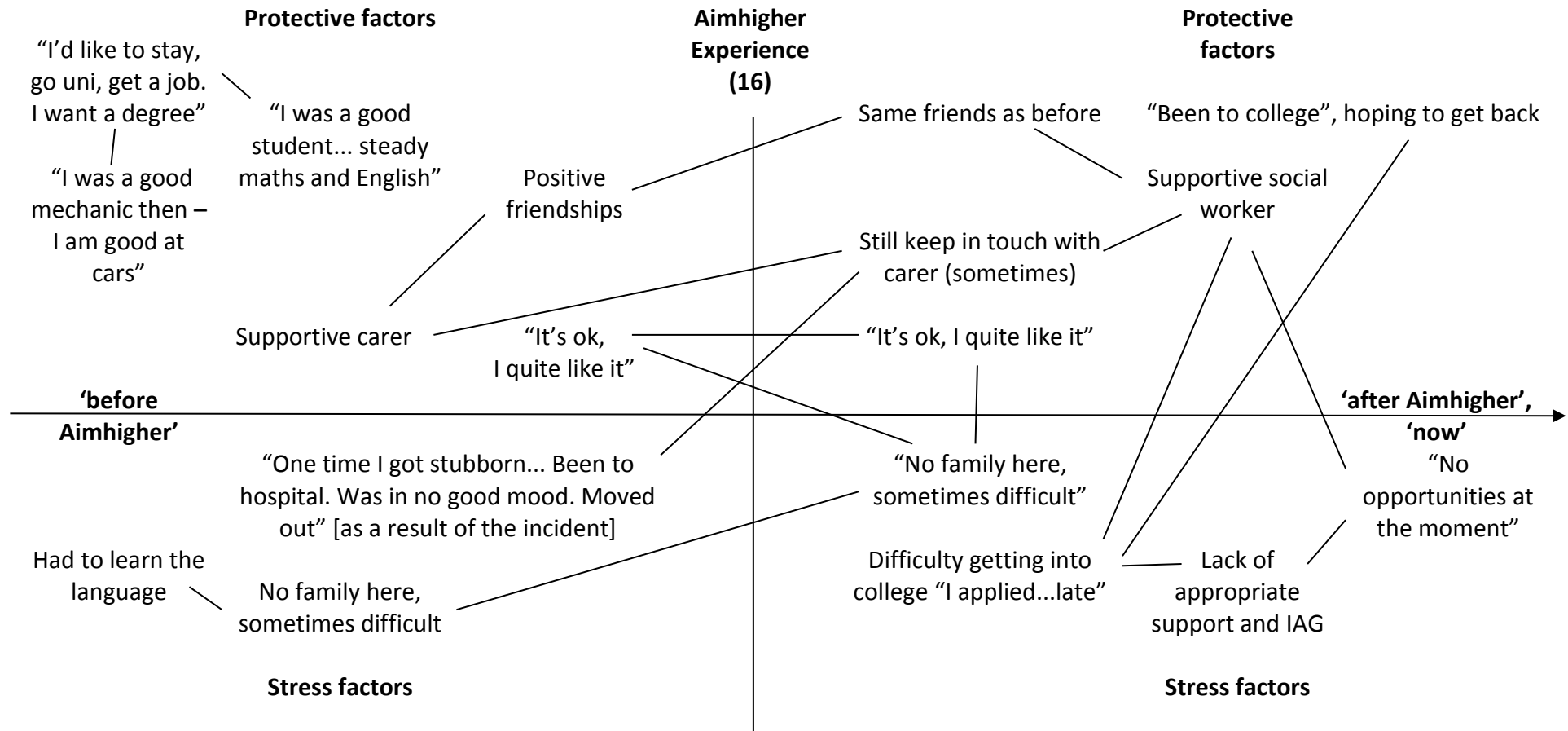
Appendix 1 (continued). Life trajectory maps. No11 Rowena, 18, care leaver



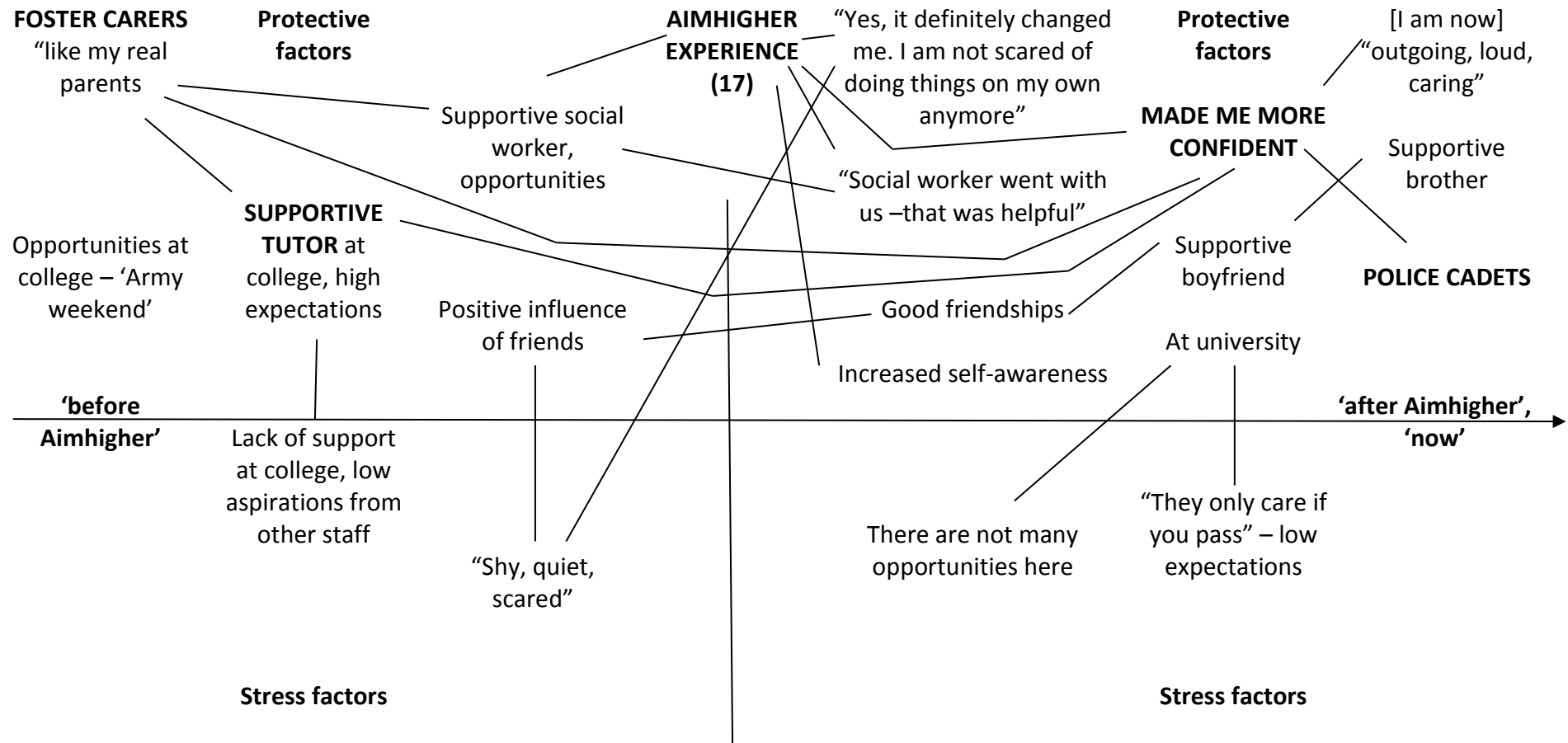
Appendix 1 (continued). Life trajectory maps. No12 Zamir, 16, in foster care



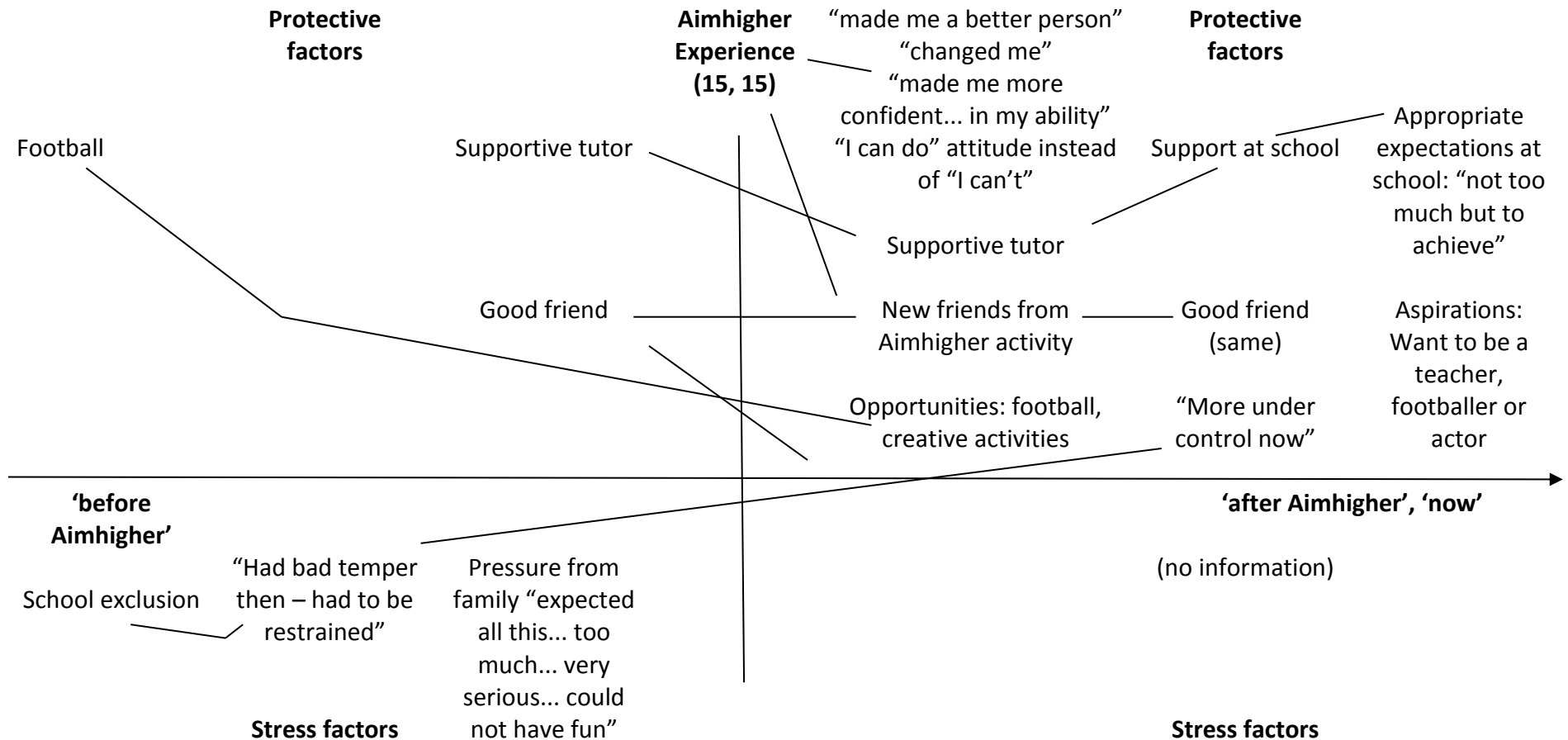
Appendix 1 (continued). Life trajectory maps. No13 Saleem, 18, care leaver (came to the UK at 14)



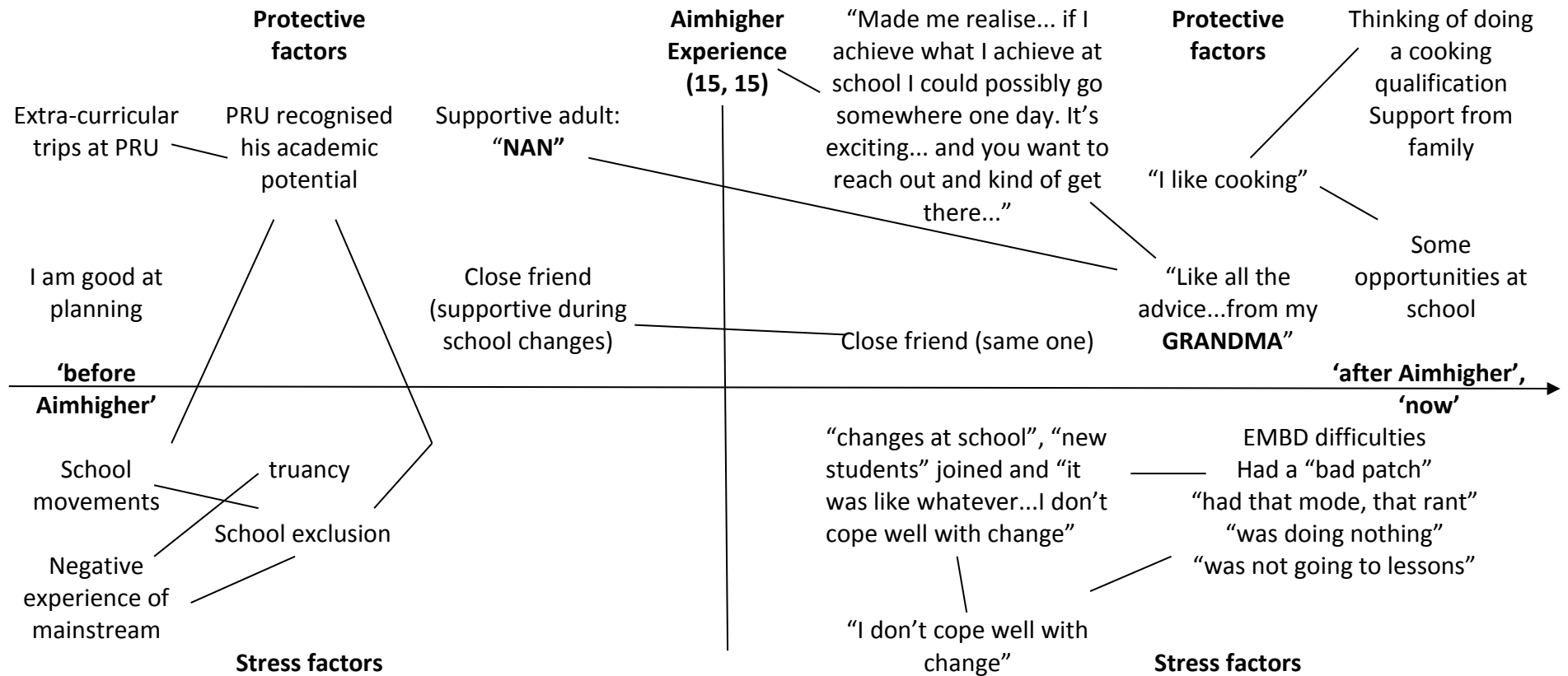
Appendix 1 (continued). Life trajectory maps. No14 Stephanie, 20, care leaver



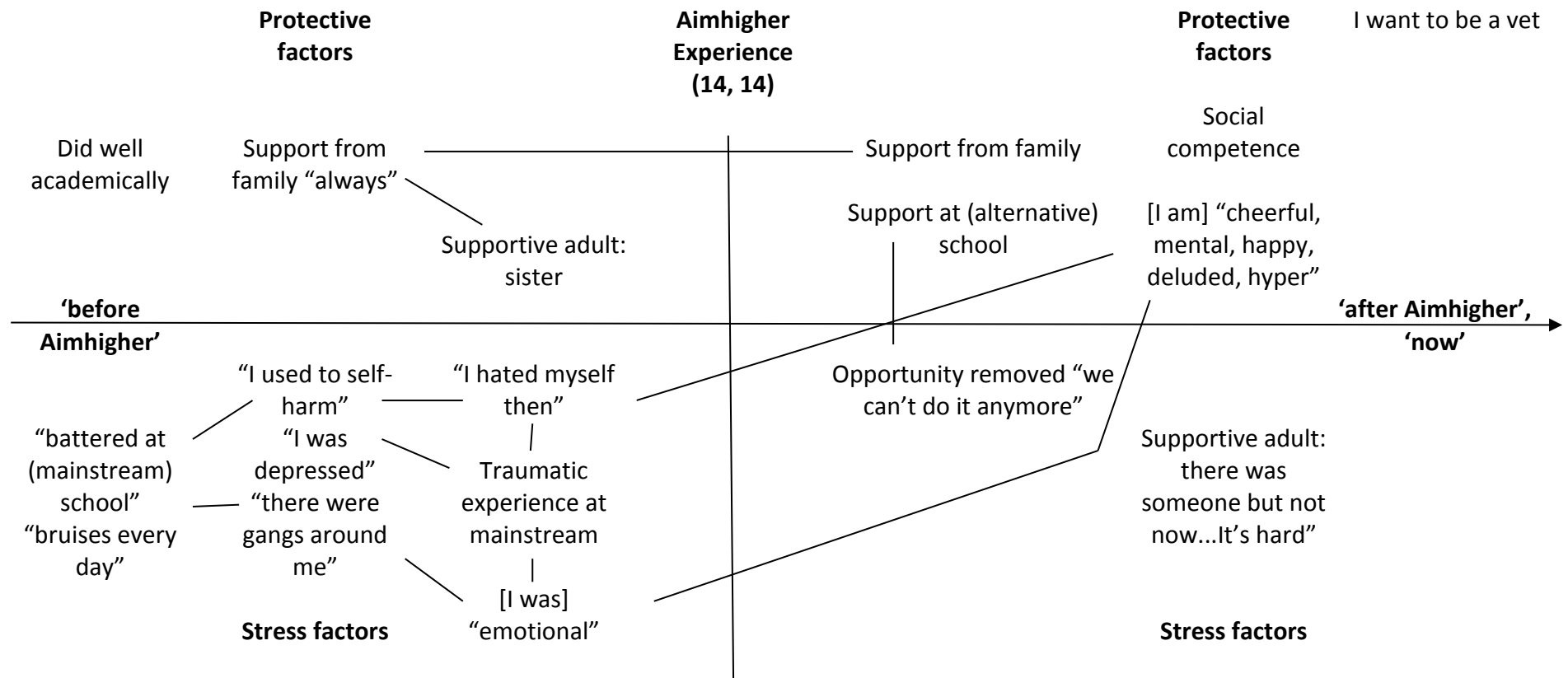
Appendix 1 (continued). Life trajectory maps. No15 Thomas, 15, in foster care and in alternative education



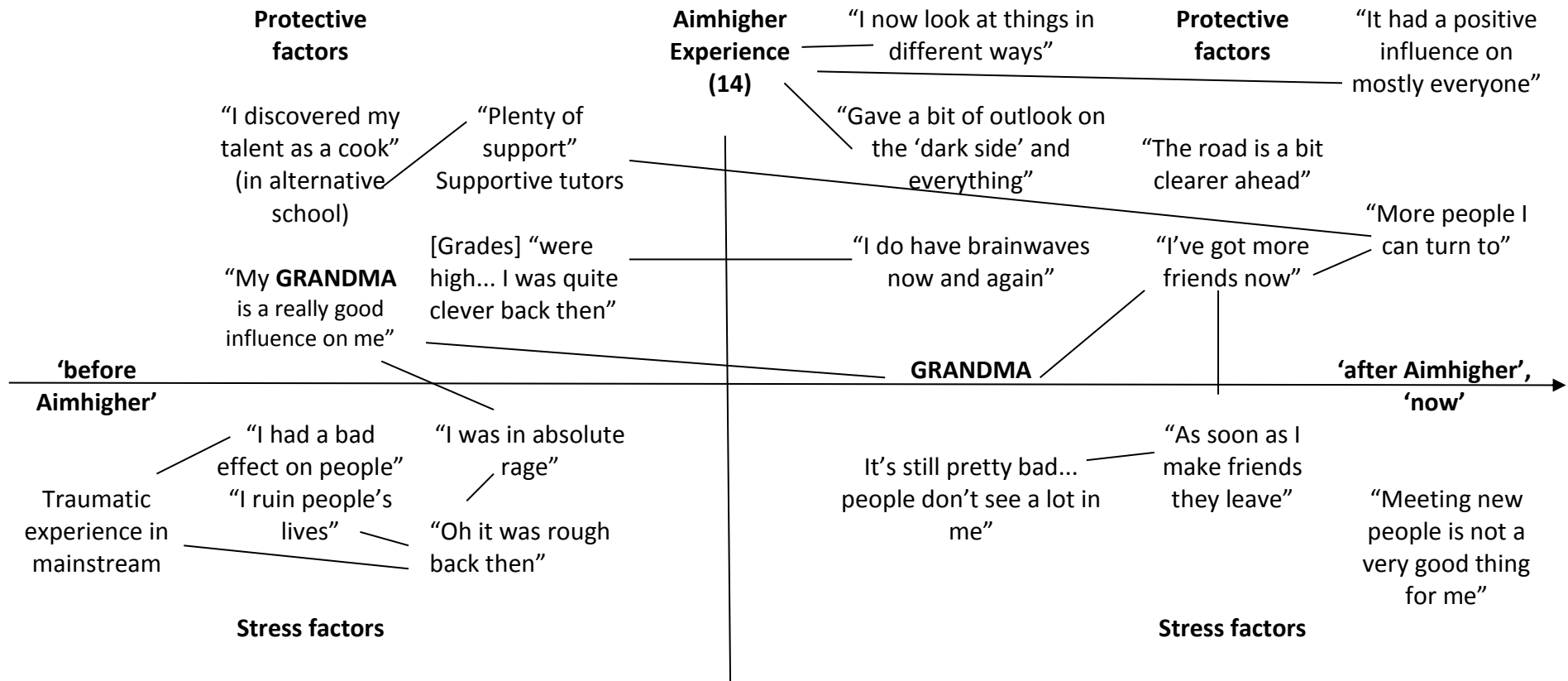
Appendix 1 (continued). Life trajectory maps. No16 Lee, 15, in alternative education



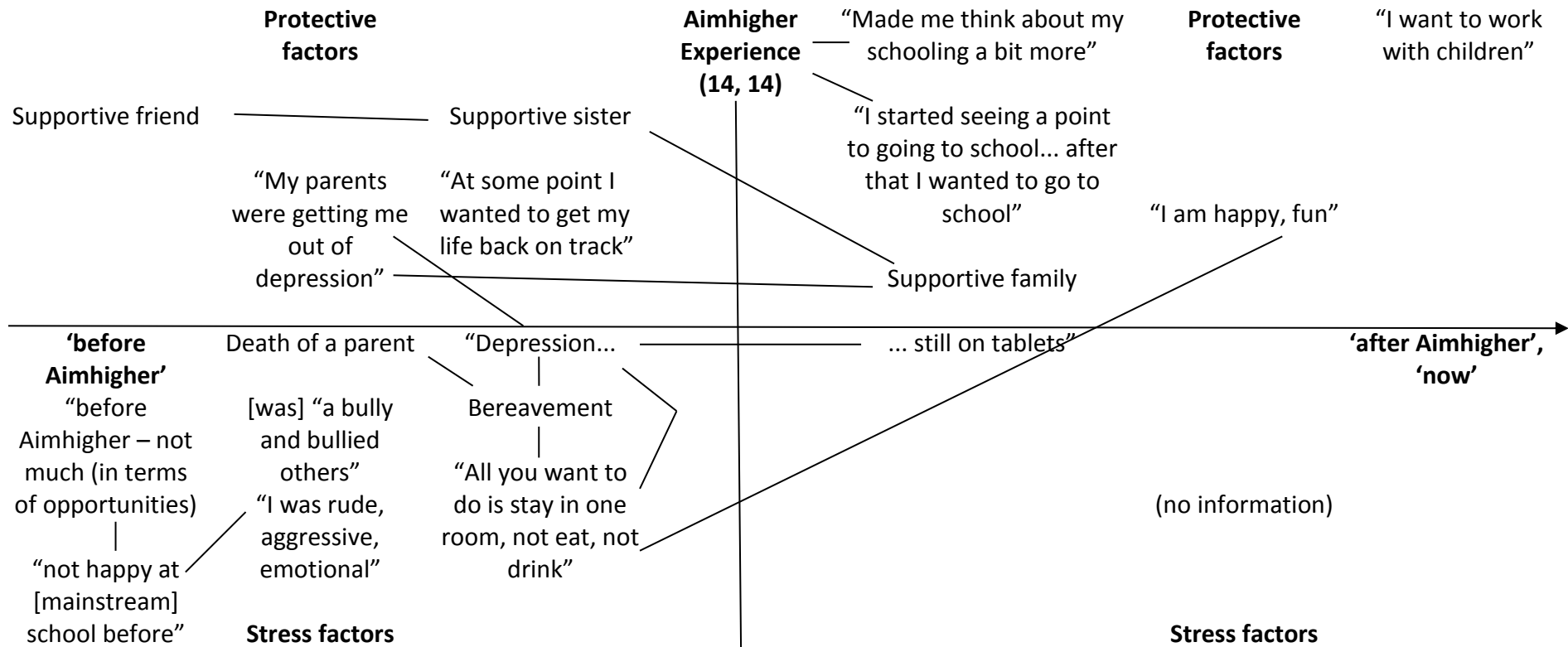
Appendix 1 (continued). Life trajectory maps. No17 Davina, 14, in alternative education



Appendix 1 (continued). Life trajectory maps. No18 Tony, 15, in alternative education



Appendix 1 (continued). Life trajectory maps. N19 Lorraine, 14, in alternative education



Appendix 2. The interview schedule template

Name of the young person:

No of the interview:

Date of the interview:

I. Introduction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thank you very much for taking the time to see me. As we discussed over the phone, I will be asking you questions with regards to your Aimhigher experience - Just to go over some things again.... - Go over anonymity and confidentiality
II. General info
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. First, tell me a little about yourself 2. What you are up to 3. What you are up to, do you go to school or college.... 4. How old are you ... 5. Just out of interest, why did you want to participate in this project?
III. Aimhigher activity
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What Aimhigher activities did you take part in, please describe the activities the way you remember them (summer residential/ mentoring scheme/ visit to the university/ aspirational work with undergraduates) 2. How long ago was it / how old were you then 3. Looking back, why did you sign up to take part
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. With regards to your Aimhigher experience, 2. What did you expect? 3. Was it what you expected? 4. If yes, to which extent and 5. How? Please describe it to me 6. Was there anything else? 7. Has anything happened that you did not expect? 8. What can you remember about it?
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Did these activities affect you/ change you in any way? 10. If yes, how? 11. What makes you think so?

Appendix 2 (continued). The interview schedule template

IV. Resilience domains 'before Aimhigher'
1. Environmental and family / foster carers factors. How would you describe your life then – in terms of the following:
Your grades at school: 10 (high) - 1 (low)
Expectations your family / foster carers had of you: 10 (high) - 1 (low)
Expectations the school had of you and your achievements: 10 (high) - 1 (low)
Support you had from your family / foster carers: 10 (high) - 1 (low)
Support you had from adults at school or other places: 10 (high) - 1 (low)
Close friendships with other young people: 10 (high) - 1 (low)
Opportunities to take part in new challenges: 10 (high) - 1 (low)
Having a supportive adult in your life who you could come to for help: 10 (high) - 1 (low)
Anything else?
2. Individual characteristics How would you describe yourself at that time in life – in terms of the following:
Feeling comfortable around people you don't know/ making new friends (<i>social competence</i>): 10 (high) - 1 (low)
Your expectations of what you can achieve (<i>expectations of self</i>): 10 (high) - 1 (low)
Knowing what you want to do in the future (<i>goals and aspirations</i>): 10 (high) - 1 (low)
Knowing what your stronger and weaker points are (<i>self-awareness</i>): 10 (high) - 1 (low)
Being able to plan and do things on your own (<i>autonomy/ self-efficacy</i>): 10 (high) - 1 (low)

Appendix 2 (continued). The interview schedule template

Anything else?
3. Three words If you only had three words to describe yourself at that time, what words would you chose? And why?
V. Resilience domains 'after Aimhigher' / now
1. Environmental and family / foster carers factors How would you describe your life – in terms of the following:
Your grades at school/ college: 10 (high) - 1 (low)
Expectations your family / foster carers / foster carers have had of you: 10 (high) - 1 (low)
Expectations the school had of you and your achievements: 10 (high) - 1 (low)
Support you have had from your family / foster carers: 10 (high) - 1 (low)
Support you have had from adults at school or other places: 10 (high) - 1 (low)
Close friendships with other young people: 10 (high) - 1 (low)
Opportunities to take part in new challenges: 10 (high) - 1 (low)
Having a supportive adult in your life who you could come to for help: 10 (high) - 1 (low)
Anything else?
2. Individual characteristics How would you describe yourself– in terms of the following:
Feeling comfortable around people you don't know/ making new friends (<i>social competence</i>): 10 (high) - 1 (low)
Your expectations of what you can achieve (<i>expectations of self</i>): 10 (high) - 1 (low)
Knowing what you want to do in the future (<i>goals and aspirations</i>): 10 (high) - 1 (low)

Appendix 2 (continued). The interview schedule

Knowing what your stronger and weaker points are (<i>self-awareness</i>): 10 (high) - 1 (low)
Being able to plan and do things on your own (<i>autonomy/ self-efficacy</i>): 10 (high) - 1 (low)
Anything else?
3. Three words If you only had three words to describe yourself now, what words would you chose? And why?
VI. Key people and events
If you look at your life between the time you took part in Aimhigher and now, 1. What would have been the most important events in your life? 2. Who or what changed you or affected you in any way? Please describe
VII. Final words...
1. Going back to Aimhigher activities, 2. What was good (or perhaps not so good) for you? 3. What about other young people? 4. How can we improve the programme in the future?
Is there anything else you wanted to add or comment on?

Appendix 3. Types of data used for the study

Type of data	Quantity
<i>Main data</i>	
Interview transcripts and notes (young people)	19
Interview transcripts and notes (professionals)	9
<i>'Satellite' context</i>	
Interview transcript with a foster carer	1
Letter from a care leaver	1
Summer School 3 (2007) creative writing material	7
Summer School 3 (2008) reflective diaries	4
Summer School 3 (2008) creative writing material	13
Summer School 1 (2009)	3
Summer School 3 (2010) reflective diaries	13
Summer School 3 (2010) feedback forms	3
Summer School 5 (2011) reflective diaries	9
Summer School 5 (2011) feedback forms	11

Appendix 4. Word frequencies

Word frequencies for the interview question: “Please describe yourself in three words, how you were ‘before Aimhigher’ and how you are ‘now’”. To support the infographic data presentation in Chapter 6 (Figures 6:2 and 6:3).

“Before”		“Now”	
Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency
shy	6	more	5
quiet	5	confident	4
really	4	happy	4
scared	3	now	3
myself	3	outgoing	2
things	3	focused	2
nervous	2	developing	2
new	2	fun	2
emotional	2	loud	2
adventurous	1	want	2
did not know	1	still	2
angry	1	caring	2
outspoken	1	need	1
expect	1	person	1
rude	1	normal	1
challenges	1	little	1
boisterous	1	aware	1
miserable	1	same	1
built-up	1	comfortable	1
confident	1	changed	1
doing	1	age	1
hot-headed	1	cheerful	1
calm	1	rude	1
bored	1	clearer	1
interested	1	difference	1
kind	1	exciting	1
slightly	1	involved	1
aggressive	1	strong	1
lonely	1	more-aware	1
want	1	talented	1
funny	1	thoughtful	1

Appendix 4 (continued). Word frequencies

Word frequencies for the interview question: “Please describe yourself in three words, how you were ‘before Aimhigher’ and how you are ‘now’”. To support the infographic data presentation in Chapter 6 (Figures 6:2 and 6:3).

“Before”		“Now”	
Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency
deluded	1	different	1
fed-up	1	acceptable	1
young	1	hyper	1
mischievous	1	over-think	1
keep	1	not overconfident	1
very	1	kind	1
		smarter	1
		hot-headed	1
		100%	1
		tall	1
		definitely	1
		ball	1
		corner	1
		ahead	1
		funny	1
		deluded	1
		self-absorbed	1
		mature	1
		mental	1
		handsome	1
		energy	1
		very	1

References

Achieveability (2013) *AchieveAbility is committed to promoting policy and delivering practice for successful educational, employment and training opportunities for people with dyslexia*, [Online]. Available at: <http://www.achieveability.org.uk/> (Accessed: 9 April 2013)

Achievement for All (2013) 'Narrowing the gap: Achievement for All and the pupil premium', News release, 26 March [Online]. Available at: <http://www.afa3as.org.uk/news/narrowing-the-gap-achievement-for-all-and-the-pupil-premium> (Accessed: 8 May 2013)

Adams, B. and Sydie, R. *Sociological Theory* (2001) *Dawsonera* [Online] Available at: <http://www.dawsonera.com/depp/reader/protected/external/AbstractView/S9781452264516> (Accessed: 27 March 2013)

Ahern, N., Kiehl, E., Sole, M., Byers, J. (2006) 'A Review of Instruments Measuring Resilience', *Issues in Comprehensive Paediatric Nursing*, 29(2), pp. 103-125

Aimhigher North Yorkshire (2008). *Aimhigher Area Partnership Strategic Plan 2008-2011* [Online]. Available at: <http://www2.yorks.ac.uk/aimhigher/documents/Strategic%20Plan%202008-2011.pdf> (Accessed: 17 March 2013)

Aimhigher Northamptonshire (2010) *Aimhigher Northamptonshire Newsletter* [Online]. Available at: <http://www.aimhighernorthamptonshire.ac.uk/docs/AH%20Newsletter%202007.pdf> (Accessed: 25 June 2012)

Aimhigher West Midlands (2011) *Aimhigher information sharing protocol*. Higher Education Academy [Online]. Available at: http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/aim_higher/AHWM_information_sharing_protocol (Accessed: 8 April 2013)

Aldridge, S., Dent, P. (2010) *Alignment report: local authorities and partnerships* [Online]. Aimhigher Tyne and Wear Northumberland, and Aimhigher Coventry and Warwickshire

Arlington, E. and Wilson, M. (2000) 'A re-examination of risk and resilience during adolescence: incorporating culture and diversity', *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 9 (2), pp. 221-230, *Springer Link* [Online] Available at: <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1023%2FA%3A1009423106045?LI=true#page-1> (Accessed: 18 March 2013)

Armour, K. and Duncomb, R. (2012) 'Changing lives? Critical evaluation of a school-based athlete role model intervention', *Sport, Education & Society*, 17 (3), pp. 381-403, *SPORTDiscus with Full Text, EBSCOhost* [Online]. Available at: <http://0-ehis.ebscohost.com.brum.beds.ac.uk> (Accessed: 17 March 2013)

Atew, B., Kemmis, S. and Weeks, P. (Eds) (1998). *Action research in practice: partnerships for social justice in education*. London: Routledge

Atherton, G. (2012a) 'Access HE: can collaborative outreach work continue in London after Aimhigher? Innovative Practice', *Journal of Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 13, Special Issue, pp. 93-100 [Online]. Available at: <http://www.accesshe.ac.uk/yYdlx0u7/OU-Journal-fulltext.pdf> (Accessed: 29 March 2013)

Atherton, G. (2012b) 'Rivals and collaborators', *Times Higher*, 30 August [Online]. <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/news/rivals-and-collaborators/421004.article> (Accessed: 8 April 2013)

Atherton, G. (2013) 'Life after Aimhigher: access from the ground level', *Times Higher*, 21 March [Online]. Available at:

<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/comment/opinion/life-after-aimhigher-access-from-the-ground-level/2002638.article> (Accessed: 5 April 2013)

Attwood, R. (2010a) 'Black spots loom as Aimhigher shuts', *Times Higher*, 2 December [Online]. Available at: <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/414457.article> (Accessed: 4 April 2013)

Attwood, R. (2010b) 'Aimhigher brought down by coalition axe', *Times Higher*, 25 November [Online]. Available at: <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/414416.article> (Accessed: 5 April 2013)

Bachay, J., Cingel, P. (1999) 'Restructuring Resilience: Emerging Voices', *Affilia*, 14 (2), pp. 162-175, *Sage Journals* [Online]. Available at: <http://aff.sagepub.com/content/14/2/162.full.pdf+html> (Accessed: 1 January 2012)

Bandura, A. (Ed.) (1997) *Self-efficacy in changing societies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University press

Barker, J. and Weller, S. (2003) 'Is it fun? Developing children centred research methods', *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 23 (1), pp. 33 - 58

Barnes, M., Green, R. and Ross, A. (2011) *Understanding vulnerable young people: Analysis from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England*. Research Report DFE-RR118. Department for Education [Online]. Available at: <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/RSG/Youthandadolescence/Page1/DFE-RR118> (Accessed: 14 March 2013)

Barrett, D. and Kukhareva, M. (2010) 'Family relations', in Hawes, J. and Hiner, R. (Eds) *A cultural history of childhood and family in the modern age*. Oxford: Berg, pp. 229-260

Barrett, P., Sonderegger, R. and Xenos, S. (2003) 'Using friends to combat anxiety and adjustment problems among young migrants to Australia: a national trial', *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 8 (2), pp.241-260 [Online]. Available at: http://www.pathwaystoresilience.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Barrett-et-al-2003-Using-frineds-combat-anxiety-young-migrants_ClinicalChildPsychologyPsychiatry.pdf (Accessed: 29 March 213)

BBC (2010) 'Aimhigher university access scheme scrapped', *BBC*, 25 November. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-11839774> (Accessed: 9 April 2013)

BBC (2013) 'UK to avoid triple dip recession, says BCC'. *BBC*, 2 April [Online] Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-21998652> (Accessed: 4 April 2013)

Becher, H. and Husain, F. (2003) *Supporting minority ethnic families - South Asian Hindu and Muslims in Britain: developments in family support*. London: National Family and Parenting Institute

Benzies, K. and Mychasiuk, R. (2008) 'Fostering family resiliency: a review of the key protective factors', *Child and Family Social Work*, 14 (1), pp. 103-114. *Wiley Online Library* [Online]. Available at: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1365-2206.2008.00586.x/pdf> (Accessed: 10 July 2012)

Berridge, D, Beecham, J, Brodie, I, Cole, T, Daniels, H, Knapp, M, & MacNeill, V. (2003) 'Services for troubled adolescents: exploring user variation', *Child and Family Social Work*, 8 (4), pp. 269-279, *CINAHL Plus with Full Text, EBSCOhost* [Online]. Available at: <http://0-ehis.ebscohost.com.brum.beds.ac.uk> (Accessed: 16 March 2013)

Berridge, D. (2007) 'Theory and explanation in child welfare: education and looked-after children', *Child & Family Social Work*, 12 (1), pp. 1–11, *Wiley Online Library* [Online]. Available at: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com> (Accessed on: 10 March 2013)

Berridge, D., Biehal, N. and Henry, L. (2012) *Living in Children's residential homes*. Research Report DFE-RR201. Department for Education [Online]. Available at: <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/DFE-RR201.pdf> (Accessed: 13 April 2013)

Bloomer, M., Hodgkinson, P. (2000) 'Learning careers: continuity and change in young people's dispositions to learning', *British Educational Research Journal* 26 (5), pp. 583-97

Blum, R., McNeely, C. and Nonnemaker, J. (2002) 'Vulnerability, risk and protection', *The Journal of Adolescent Health*, 31(1; Supplement), pp. 28-39

Boddy, J., Statham, J., McQuail, S., Petrie, P. and Owen, C. (2009) *Working at the 'edges' of care? European models of support for young people and families*, DCSF [Online]. Available at: <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/DCSF-RBX-09-07.pdf> (Accessed: 16 April 2013)

Boffey, D. (2011) 'Anger as £78m Aimhigher support scheme for students is axed', *The Guardian*, 20 August [Online]. Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/aug/20/aimhigher-support-scheme-students-axed> (Accessed: 5 April 2013)

Bostock, L. (2004) *Promoting resilience in fostered children and young people*, Social Care Institute for Excellence [Online]. Available at: <http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/guides/guide06/files/guide06.pdf> (Accessed: 28 March 2013)

Boyden, J. and Cooper, E. (2007) *Questioning the power of resilience: are children up to the task of disrupting the transmission of poverty?* CPRC Working Paper 73. Oxford: Chronic poverty research centre

Brackertz, N. (2007) *Why is hard to reach and why?* ISR Working paper. The Swinburne Institute for Social Research, Australia

Brand, F. and Jax, K. (2007) 'Focusing the meaning(s) of resilience: resilience as a descriptive concept and a boundary object', *Ecology and Society*, 12 (1), art.23 [Online]. Available at: <http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol12/iss1/art23/> (Accessed: 6 August 2012)

Brannick, T., Coghlan, D. (2007) 'In defence of being "native": the case for insider academic research', *Organizational Research Methods* 10 (1), pp.59-74, *Sage Journals* [Online]. Available at <http://orm.sagepub.com/content/10/1/59> (Accessed: 15 November 2011)

Brennan, P.A., Le Brocque, R. and Hammen, C. (2003) 'Maternal depression, parent-child relationship, and resilience outcomes in adolescence', *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 42 (2), pp. 1469-1477, *SocINDEX with Full Text* [Online]. Available at: <http://0-ehis.ebscohost.com.brum.beds.ac.uk/> (Accessed: 10 July 2012)

British Youth Council (2013) *Youth Voice: What's it about?* [Online]. Available at: <http://www.byc.org.uk/uk-work/youth-voice/what's-it-about.aspx> (Accessed: 7 May 2013)

Brodie, I. (2001) *Children's home and school exclusion: redefining the problem*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Brodie, I. and Berridge, D. (1997) *School exclusions research themes and issues*. University of Luton Press

Brodie, I. and Morris, M. (2009) *Improving educational outcomes for looked-after children and young people: research review 1*, Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services [Online]. Available at

www.c4eo.org.uk/themes/vulnerablechildren/educationaloutcomes/files/improving_educational_outcomes_research_review_1.pdf (Accessed 12 April 2011)

Brodie, I., Bostock, L., Clapton, J., Fish, J., Fisher, M., Morris, M., Kearney, P. and Rutter, D. (2009) *Improving educational outcomes for looked-after children and young people*, Scoping review 1, The Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services. C4EO [Online]. Available at:

http://www.c4eo.org.uk/themes/vulnerablechildren/educationaloutcomes/files/c4eo_improving_educational_outcomes_scoping_review.pdf (Accessed: 6 April 2013)

Brookes, E. (2004) 'Taking the mick', *The Guardian*, 15 January [Online]. Available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2003/jan/15/education.highereducation> (Accessed on 6 June 2012)

Brown, T. (2007) 'Lost and turned out: academic, social and emotional experiences of students excluded from school', *Urban Education* 42 (5), pp. 432-455, *Sage Journals* [Online]. Available at: <http://uex.sagepub.com/content/42/5/432> (Accessed: 10 March 2013)

Bryman (2008) *Social research methods*. Oxford: Oxford University press, 3rd ed.

BSA (2002) *Statement of ethical practice for the British Sociological Association*. BSA [Online]. Available at: <http://www.britsoc.co.uk/media/27107/StatementofEthicalPractice.pdf> (Accessed: 3 March 2009)

Buckingham Shum, S. and Deakin Crick, R. (2012) Learning dispositions and transferable competencies: pedagogy, modelling and learning analytics. Conference Paper, *2nd International Conference on Learning Analytics & Knowledge*, 29 Apr - 02 May 2012, Vancouver, Canada. Open University [Online]. Available at: <http://oro.open.ac.uk/32823/> (Accessed: 10 March 2013)

Burke, P. (2012) *The right to higher education: beyond widening participation*. London: Routledge

Bushe, S., Kenway, P. and Aldridge, H. (2013) The impact of localising council tax benefit: report summary, Joseph Rowntree Foundation [Online]. Available at: <http://www.irf.org.uk/publications/impact-localising-council-tax-benefit> (Accessed: 5 May 2013)

Butler, P. and Malik, S. (2010) 'All in it together? Young people and the cuts', *The Guardian*, 8 December [Online]. Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/patrick-butler-cuts-blog/2010/dec/08/young-people-unfairly-hit-by-cuts> (Accessed: 17 March 2013)

Bynner, J. and Egerton, M. (2001) *The wider benefits of higher education. Report by the Institute of Education*, University of London [Online]. Available at: http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100202100434/http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2001/01_46.htm (Accessed: 6 April 2013)

Cabinet Office (2006) *Reaching Out: An Action Plan on Social Exclusion*, University of Bristol [Online]. Available at: http://www.bris.ac.uk/poverty/downloads/keyofficialdocuments/reaching_out_full.pdf (Accessed: 3 April 2013)

Cabinet Office (2011) *Opening Doors, Breaking Barriers: A Strategy for Social Mobility*, Cabinet Office [Online]. Available at: http://www.dpm.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files_dpm/resources/opening-doors-breaking-barriers.pdf

Cabinet Office (2013) Increasing opportunities for young people and helping them to achieve their potential [Online]. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/increasing-opportunities-for-young-people-and-helping-them-to-achieve-their-potential> (Accessed: 8 May 2013)

Carpenter, C., Church, E., Kerrigan, M. (2010) *A taste of uni: an evaluation of the Aimhigher Lincolnshire and Rutland residential programmes*. Higher Education Academy [Online]. Available at: [http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/aim_higher/AHLR-A taste of Uni-Residential Programme.pdf](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/aim_higher/AHLR-A_taste_of_Uni-Residential_Programme.pdf) (Accessed: 3 March 2012)

Carreres-Ponsoda, F., Carbonell, A., Cortell-Tormo, J., Fuster-Lloret, V. and Andreu-Cabrera, E. (2012) 'The relationship between out-of-school sport participation and positive youth development', *Journal of Human Sport and Exercise*, 7 (3), pp.671-683. *SPORTDiscus with Full text, EBSCOhost* [Online]. Available at: <http://0-ehis.ebscohost.com.brum.beds.ac.uk> (Accessed 13 March 2013)

Charmaz, K. (2006) *Constructing grounded theory: a practical guide through qualitative analysis*. London: Sage

Chater, D. and Le Grand, J. (2006) *Looked after or overlooked? Good parenting and school choice for looked after children*. The Social Market Foundation [Online]. Available at: [http://www.smf.co.uk/files/6213/2317/4314/Looked After or Overlooked essay.pdf](http://www.smf.co.uk/files/6213/2317/4314/Looked_After_or_Overlooked_essay.pdf) (Accessed: 8 April 2013)

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (2008) *Children and young people in mind: the final report of the National CAMHS Review*. Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department of Health

Children in Scotland (2006) *My Turn to Talk? The Participation of Looked After and Accommodated Children in Decision-Making about Their Own Care*. Children in Scotland [Online] Available at: <http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/docs/pubs/MyTurntoTalk.pdf> (Accessed: 28 March 2013)

Chilos, D., Noble, M., Broadhead, P. and Wilkinson, M. (2008) *Measuring the impact of Aimhigher on participation in higher education by learners in South East London*, Higher Education Academy [Online]. Available at:
http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/aim_higher/Aspire-AH_Participate_in_HE-SE_London (Accessed: 6 April 2013)

Chilos, D., Noble, M., Broadhead, P. and Wilkinson, M. (2009). *Red herrings and real problems*. Higher Education Academy [Online]. Available at:
http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/Aspire-Reflections_on_evaluation_of_Aimhigher (Accessed: 1 March 2012)

Christensen, J. (2010) 'Proposed Enhancement of Bronfenbrenner's Development Ecology Model', *Education Inquiry*, 1 (2), pp.101–110 [Online]. Available at:
<http://dspace.mah.se/dspace/bitstream/handle/2043/10498/EducationInquiryJune2010.pdf> (Accessed: 29 March 2013)

Cidell, J. (2010) 'Content clouds as exploratory qualitative data analysis', *Area*, [42](#) (4), pp.514–523. *Wiley Online Library* [Online]. Available at:
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1475-4762.2010.00952.x/pdf> (Accessed: 11 April 2013)

City and Guilds Centre for Skills and Development (2012) *School 'boring and irrelevant'*. City and Guilds centre for Skills and Development [Online]. Available at:
http://www.skillsdevelopment.org/newsevents/archive_news-research/school_%E2%80%98boring_and_irrelevant%E2%80%99.aspx (Accessed: 15 March)

Clare, J. (2003) 'Universities should be open to all like shops', *The Daily Telegraph*, 20 February, [Online]. Available at
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/3307493/Universities-should-be-open-to-all-like-shops.html> (Accessed 6 June 2012)

Clark, C., Ghosh, A., Green, E. and Shariff, N. (2008) *Media Portrayal of Young People – impact and influences*. National Children’s Bureau. Available at:

<http://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/childrens-research-centre/files/crc-pr/file/ecms/web-content/clarke.pdf> (Accessed: 6 April 2013)

Clarke, C. (2003) *The future of higher education*, London: The Stationary Office

Clery, E., Morrell, G., Lee, L. and Kotecha, M. (2012) Evaluation of National Citizen

Service Pilots: interim report, NatCen Social Research, The Office for Public

Management and New Philanthropy Capital [Online]. Available at:

<http://www.natcen.ac.uk/media/898405/ncs-evaluation-interim-report.pdf> (Accessed: 7 May 2013)

Cohen, A. (1989) *The symbolic construction of community*. London: Routledge

Coholic, D. (2011) ‘Exploring the feasibility and benefits of arts-based mindfulness-based practices with young people in need: aiming to improve aspects of self-awareness and resilience’, *Child & Youth Care Forum*, 40 (4), pp. 303-317, *Education Research Complete, EBSCOhost*, [Online]. Available at: [http://0-](http://0-ehis.ebscohost.com/brum.beds.ac.uk)

[ehis.ebscohost.com/brum.beds.ac.uk](http://0-ehis.ebscohost.com/brum.beds.ac.uk) (Accessed: 13 March 2013)

Coleman, J. (2011) *The nature of adolescence, Dawsonera* [Online] Available at:

<http://library.beds.ac.uk/record=b1527042~S20> (Accessed: 10 March 2013)

Combe, V. (2002) Involving young people in local authority decision making: report summary, Joseph Rowntree Foundation [Online]. Available at:

<http://www.irf.org.uk/publications/involving-young-people-local-authority-decision-making> (Accessed: 13 May 2013)

Comfort, L., Bojn, A. and Demchak, C (2010) *Designing resilience: preparing for extreme events*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press

Corden, A. and Sainsbury, R. (2006) *Using Verbatim Quotations in Reporting Qualitative Social Research: The views of research users*. ESRC Report 2187. Social Policy Research Unit and the University of York [Online]. Available at: <http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/pubs/pdf/verbusers.pdf> (Accessed: 13 April 2013)

Costanza, R., Fisher, B., Ali, S., Beer, C., Bond, L., Boumans, R., Danigelis, N., Dickinson, J., Elliott, C., Farley, J., Elliot Gayer, D., MacDonald Glenn, L., Hudspeth, T., Mahoney, D., McCahill, L., McIntosh, B., Reed, B., Abu Turab Rivi, S., Rizzo, D., Simpatico, T. and Snapp, R. (2007) 'Quality of life: An approach integrating opportunities, human needs, and subjective well-being: analysis', *Ecological economics*, 61, (2-3), pp. 267-276. *ScienceDirect* [Online] Available at: <http://www.ScienceDirect.com/science/article/pii/S0921800906000966> (Accessed: 19 March 2013).

Creegan, C. (2008) *Opportunity and aspiration: two sides of the same coin?* Report summary. Joseph Rowntree Foundation [Online]. Available at: <http://www.irf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/2285.pdf> (Accessed: 13 March 2013)

Criss, M., Pettit, G., Bates, J., Dodge, K. and Lapp, A. (2002) 'Family Adversity, Positive Peer Relationships, and Children's Externalizing Behavior: A Longitudinal Perspective on Risk and Resilience', *Child Development*, 73(4), pp. 1220–1237 *NCBI* [Online] Available at: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2756653/> (Accessed: 20 July 2012)

Crockett, Lisa J. (1995) *Developmental Paths in Adolescence: Commentary*, Faculty Publications, Department of Psychology. Paper 239. The University of Nebraska - Lincoln [Online]. Available at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1238&context=psychfacpub> (Accessed: 8 August 2012)

Curtis, K., Roberts, H., Copperman, J., Downie, A., Liabo, K. (2004) 'How come I don't get asked no questions? Researching 'hard to reach' children and teenagers', *Child &*

Family Social Work, 9 (2), pp. 167-175, EBSCOhost, [Online]. Available at <http://0-ejournals.ebsco.com.brum.beds.ac.uk/direct.asp?ArticleID=4920BEDE932DBAB9CF97>

(Accessed: 15 November 2011)

Curtis, P. (2004b) 'Tutors assured on admissions scheme', *The Guardian*, 15 October. Available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2004/oct/15/politics.accesstouniversity>

(Accessed: 6 June 2012)

Daniels, H., Cole, T., Sellman, E., Sutton, J., Visser, J. and Bedward, J. (2003) *Study of young people permanently excluded from school*. DfES Research Report No 405

[Online]. Available at:

<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/RR405.pdf>

(Accessed: 18 March 2013)

Darlington Y., Scott, D. (2002) *Qualitative research in practice: stories from the field*.

Open University Press

Davis, E. and Reed, M. (2013) 'Governing Transformation and Resilience: the role of identity in re-negotiating roles for forest-based communities of British Columbia's Interior', in Parkins, J. and Reed, M. (Eds) *Social Transformation in Rural Canada: New Insights into Community, Cultures and Collective Action*. Vancouver: UBC Press, pp.249-268

De Nooy, W. (2009) 'Formalising symbolic interactionism'. *Methodological Innovations Online*, 4, pp.39-52 [Online]. Available at: <http://dare.uva.nl/document/192539>

(Accessed: 15 March 2013)

Denzin, N. (1992) *Symbolic interactionism and cultural studies: the politics of interpretation*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers

Department for Education (2009) *The Foster Carer's Charter* [Online]. Available at: <http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/t/the%20foster%20carers%20charter.pdf> (Accessed: 16 April 2013)

Department for Education (2010a) *Children looked after in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending 31 March 2010*. Statistical first release. DfE [Online].

Available at: <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000960/sfr27-2010v2.pdf> (Accessed: 12 April 2013)

Department for Education (2010b) *Children with Special Educational Needs 2010: an analysis*. DfE [Online]. Available at:

<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/DFE-00553-2010.pdf> (Accessed: 13 April 2013)

Department for Education (2010c) *Customer voice (wave 9): aspirations of children in care: research brief*. DfE [Online]. Available at:

<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/DFE-RBX-10-03.pdf> (Accessed: 28 March 2013)

Department for Education (2011a) *The Munro review of child protection: a child-centred system*, Final Report. DfE [Online]. Available at:

<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/Munro-Review.pdf> (Accessed: 1 May 2012)

Department for Education (2011b) *Young people's involvement in decision making. Positive for youth: discussion paper* [Online]. Available at:

http://www.participationworks.org.uk/files/webfm/files/news/PAPER_2_YP_and_decision_making_19_May_2011.pdf (Accessed: 28 March 2013)

Department for Education (2011c) *Achievement for All National Evaluation: Final report*, DfE [Online]. Available at:

<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFE-RR176> (Accessed: 16 April 2013)

Department for Education (2011d) *Myplace evaluation: final report* [Online]. Available at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/181645/MYPLACE-FIN-REP.pdf (Accessed: 7 May 2013)

Department for Education (2012a) *A profile of pupil exclusions in England. Education standards analysis and research division*. DfE [Online]. Available at:

<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/DFE-RR190.pdf>

(Accessed: 10 April 2013)

Department for Education (2012b) *Children looked after in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending 31 March 2010*. Statistical release [Online]. Available at:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000960/sfr27-2010v2.pdf>

(Accessed: 13 March 2013)

Department for Education (2012c) *Children looked after in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending 31 March 2012*. Statistical First Release [Online]

Available at: <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001084/sfr20-2012.pdf> (Accessed: 29 March 2013)

Department for Education (2012d) *Permanent and fixed period exclusions from schools in England 2010/11*. DfE [Online]. Available at:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s001080/index.shtml> (Accessed: 6

April 2013)

Department for Education (2012e) *Statutory guidance and regulations on exclusion: The headteacher's power to exclude*. DfE [Online]. Available at:

<http://education.gov.uk/aboutdfe/statutory/g00210521/statutory-guidance-regs-2012/guidance/heads-power-to-exclude> (Accessed: 23 March 2013)

Department for Education (2012f) *Team around the child (TAC)*. DfE [Online]. Available at:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/strategy/integratedworking/a0068944/team-around-the-child-tac> (Accessed: 29 March 2013)

Department for Education (2012g) *Listening to and involving children and young people* [Online]. Available at:

<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/l/listening%20to%20and%20involving%20children%20and%20young%20people.pdf> (Accessed: 13 May 2013)

Department for Education (2013a) *Outcomes for children looked after by local authorities in England: 31 March 2012*. Statistical release [Online]. Available at:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/researchandstatistics/statistics/recentreleases/a00217266/outcomes-children-looked-after-las-england-march-2012> (Accessed on: 6 April 2013).

Department for Education (2013b) *Education of looked after children and care leavers*.

DfE [Online]. Available at:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/families/childrenincare/education> (Accessed: 6 April 2013)

Department for Education (2013c) *Disruptive children: new rules restore headteachers' power to exclude*. DfE [Online]. Available at:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/inthenews/inthenews/a00208163/newrulesrestoreheadteacherspower> (Accessed: 6 April 2013)

Department for Education (2013d) *The Children and Families Bill 2013* [Online].

Available at: <http://www.education.gov.uk/a00221161/children-families-bill>

(Accessed: 16 April 2013)

Department for Education (2013e) *Myplace programme: about the Myplace programme* [Online]. Available at:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/youngpeople/b00213818/myplace/about> (Accessed: 7 May 2013).

Department for Education (2013f) Pupil premium - what you need to know: general article, DfE [Online]. Available at:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/pupilsupport/premium/a0076063/pp>

(Accessed: 8 May 2013)

Department for Education and Skills (2003a) *Every Child Matters: Presented to Parliament by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury by Command of Her Majesty, September 2003*, Cm 5860. London: Stationery Office

Department for Education and Skills (2003b) *Widening participation in higher education*. London: DFES publications

Department for Education and Skills (2004) *Fair admissions to higher education: recommendations for good practice*. London: DFES publications

Department for Education and Skills (2007) *Care Matters: time for change* [Online]. Available at:

<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/Cm%207137.pdf>

(Accessed: 13 March 2012)

Department for Children, Schools and Families (2008a) *Back on Track: A strategy for modernising alternative provision for young people*. DCSF [Online]. Available at:

<http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm74/7410/7410.pdf> (Accessed: 6

April 2013)

Department for Children, Schools and Families (2008b) *Identifying gifted and talented learners – getting started*. DCSF [Online]. Available at:

<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/Getting%20StartedWR.pdf> (Accessed: 1 April 2012)

Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009) *Improving the Educational Attainment of Children in care*. DCSF [Online]. Available at:

<http://www.brent.gov.uk/media/972015/Improving%20the%20educational%20attainment%20of%20looked%20after%20children.pdf> (Accessed: 10 March 2012)

Department for Children, Schools and Families (2010) *Guidance on Looked After Children with Special Educational Needs placed out-of-authority*, DCSF [Online].

Available at:

<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DCSF-00060-2010> (Accessed: 10 March 2012)

Dixon, J. and Stein, M. (2005) *A Study of thoroughfare and aftercare services in Scotland*. Scotland's Children (Scotland) Act 1995. Research Findings No.3, Edinburgh: Scottish Executive

Doherty, P. and Stott, A. (2004) *Delivering services to hard to reach families in On Track areas: definition, consultation and needs assessment*. Home Office [Online]. Available at:

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110220105210/rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/dpr15.pdf> (Accessed: 10 April 2013)

Domokos, J. (2012) 'Illegal school exclusions: how pupils are slipping through the net', *The Guardian*, 15 November [Online]. Available at:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2012/nov/15/illegal-school-exclusions>

(Accessed: 6 April 2013)

Driscoll, J. (2012) *Supporting the educational transitions of care leavers* [Making Research Count Practice Development Seminar]: 15 October 2012 [Online]. Available at:

http://www.beds.ac.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0010/209836/Jenny-Driscoll-15-Oct-2012-Handout.pdf (Accessed: 13 May 2013)

Duncalf, Z. (2010) *Listen up! Adult Care Leavers Speak Out: The views of 310 care leavers aged 17-78*, The Care Leavers' Association [Online]. Available at:

www.careleavers.com/component/docman/doc.../61-listen-up-report (Accessed: 23 March 2013)

Dunleavy, P. (2003) *Authoring a PhD: how to plan, draft, write and finish a doctoral thesis or dissertation*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

Dyson, A., Gallannaugh, F., Humphrey, N., Lendrum, A. and Wigelsworth, M. (2010) *Closing the gap in educational achievement and improving emotional resilience for children and young people with additional needs*. Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services: research review [Online]. Available at: http://www.c4eo.org.uk/themes/schools/educationalachievement/files/kr_full_closing_the_gap.pdf (Accessed: 30 March 2013)

Economic and Social Research Council (2010) *ESRC Framework for Research Ethics 2010* [Online]. Available at: http://www.esrc.ac.uk/images/Framework-for-Research-Ethics_tcm8-4586.pdf (Accessed: 3 March 2010)

Edelston, P. (2011) 'Why university isn't the only route to a successful career', *The Guardian*, 5 September [Online]. Available at: <http://careers.guardian.co.uk/careers-blog/university-not-only-route-successful-career> (Accessed: 20 March 2013)

Edge Foundation (2012) *Summaries of research presented at the Edge Research Conference*, November 2012 [Online]. Available at: http://www.edge.co.uk/media/100901/edge_research_conference_research_conference_summaries_2012.pdf (Accessed: 15 March 2013)

Edward, K. and Warelow, P. (2005) 'Resilience: when coping is emotionally intelligent'. *Journal of the American Psychiatric Nurses Association*, 11 (2), pp. 101-102. *Sage Journals* [Online] Available at: <http://jap.sagepub.com/content/11/2/101.full.pdf+html> (Accessed: 11 June 2012)

Edwards, A. and McKenzie, L. (2005) 'Steps towards participation: the social support of learning trajectories'. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 24 (4), pp. 287-302,

Academic Search Elite, EBSCOhost [Online] Available at: <http://0-ehis.ebscohost.com.brum.beds.ac.uk> (Accessed 23 March 2013)

Elder, G. (1998) 'The life course as developmental theory'. *Child Development*, 69 (1), pp. 1-12 [Online]. Available at: <http://www.soc.washington.edu/users/brines/elder.pdf> (Accessed: 29 March 2013)

Elliott, L. (2012) 'University tuition fee increase sends inflation back up again', *The Guardian*, 13 November [Online]. Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2012/nov/13/inflation-rises-again-tuition-fees-food> (Accessed: 9 April 2013)

Elliott, T., Wilson, C. (2008) *The perceptions of students with hidden disabilities of their experience during transition to higher education*. Aimhigher: Aimhigher East of England

Evans, K. (2002) 'Taking control of their lives? agency in young adult transitions in England and the new Germany', *Journal of Youth Studies* 5 (3), pp. 245-269. *SocINDEX with Full Text, EBSCOhost* [Online] Available at: <http://0-ehis.ebscohost.com.brum.beds.ac.uk/> (Accessed: 23 March 2013)

Fitzgerald, H., Jobling, A., Kirk, A. (2003) 'Valuing the Voices of Young Disabled People: Exploring Experience of Physical Education and Sport', *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 8 (2), pp. 175-200

Flouri, E. and Panourgia, C. (2012) *Do primary school children's career aspirations matter? The relationship between family poverty, career aspirations, and emotional and behavioural problems*, CLS Working Paper 2012(5). London: Centre for Longitudinal Studies [Online]. Available at: <http://www.cls.ioe.ac.uk/shared/get-file.ashx?itemtype=document&id=1523> (Accessed: 23 March 2013).

Franklin, A. and Sloper, P. (2004) *Participation of disabled children and Young people in decision-making within Social services departments: Quality protects research initiative. A survey of current and recent activities in Social services in England*. The

University of York [Online]. Available at:

<http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/research/pdf/qualityprotects.pdf> (Accessed: 28 March 2013)

Fullan, M. (1991) *The new meaning of educational change*. London: Cassell

Fuller, A. (2000) *Raising real people: creating a resilient family*. Melbourne: ACER

Furman, R. (2004) 'Using poetry and narrative as qualitative data: exploring a father's cancer through poetry', *Families, Systems and Health*, 22 (2), 162-170

Furman, R., Langer, C., Davis, C., Gallardo, H., Kulkarni, S. (2007) 'Expressive research and reflective poetry as qualitative inquiry: a study of adolescent identity'. *Qualitative Research*, 7 (3), pp. 301-315

Furnivall, J. (2011) *Attachment-informed practice with looked after children and young people: insights*. Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services [Online]. Available at: http://www.iriss.org.uk/sites/default/files/iriss_insight10.pdf (Accessed: 13 March 2013)

Galton, M., Gray, J. and Ruddock, J. (1999) *The impact of school transitions and transfers on pupil progress and attainment*. DfEE Research report No 131 [Online].

Available at:

<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/RR131.pdf>

(Accessed: 18 March 2013)

Garmezy, N. (1991) 'Resilience and vulnerability to adverse developmental outcomes associated with poverty'. *American Behavioural Scientist*, 34 (4), pp.416-430. *Sage Journals* [Online] Available at: <http://abs.sagepub.com/content/34/4/416.full.pdf+html>

(Accessed: 10 July 2012)

Garmezy, N. and Rutter, M. (1983) *Stress, coping and development in children*. New York: McGraw-Hill

Gilligan, R. (1999) 'Enhancing the resilience of children and young people in public care by mentoring their talents and interests'. *Child and Family Social Work*, 4 (3), pp. 187-196 [Online]. Available at:

[http://conversation.lausanne.org/uploads/resources/files/789/RES023_Enhancing the Resilience of Children and Young People in Public Care.pdf](http://conversation.lausanne.org/uploads/resources/files/789/RES023_Enhancing_the_Resilience_of_Children_and_Young_People_in_Public_Care.pdf) (Accessed: 1 June 2012)

Gilligan, R. (2009) *Promoting resilience: supporting children and young people who are in care, adopted or in need*. London: BAAF

Gilligan, R. (2000) 'Adversity, resilience and young people: the protective value of positive school and spare time experiences', *Children and Society*, 14 (1), pp. 37-47, *SocINDEX with Full Text* [Online] Available at: <http://0-ehis.ebscohost.com/brum.beds.ac.uk/> (Accessed: 10 July 2012)

Goldstein, S. and Brooks, R.B.(eds) (2013) *Handbook of resilience in children, Dawsonera* [Online] Available at: <http://www.dawsonera.com/depp/reader/protected/external/AbstractView/S9781461436614> (Accessed: 13 March 2013)

Gorard, S., Smith, E., Thomas, L., May, H., Adnett, N., Slack, K. (2006). *Review of widening participation research: addressing the barriers to participation in higher education*. A report to HEFCE by the University of York, Higher Education Academy and Institute for Access Studies.

Great Britain (2000) *The Leaving Care Act*. Available at: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/35/pdfs/ukpga_20000035_en.pdf (Accessed: 1 March 2012)

Great Britain (2009) *Realising Young Potential: supporting care leavers into education, employment and training*. Cabinet Office: Social Exclusion Task Force

Greene, R., Pugh, R. and Roberts, D. (2008) *Black and minority ethnic parents with mental health problems and their children*. SCIE Research Briefing 29 [Online].

Available at: <http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/briefings/briefing29/> (Accessed: 3 March 2012)

Grey, M. (2011) 'Back to Basics: A Critique of the Strengths Perspective in Social Work. Reconceptualising theory and practice', *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, 92 (1), pp. 5-11 [Online]. Available at:

http://www.familiesinsociety.org/articlearchive/2011/92-1_gray.pdf (Accessed: 28 March 2013).

Grinyer, A. (2005) *Social research update* (ISSN: 1360-7898), University of Surrey

[Online]. Available at <http://sru.soc.surrey.ac.uk/SRU46.html> (Accessed 15 November 2011)

Grosnoe, R. and Elder, G. (2004) 'Family dynamics, supportive relationships and educational resilience during adolescence'. *Journal of Family Issues*, 25 (5), pp. 571-602. *Sage Journals* [Online] Available at:

<http://www.sagepub.com/dimensionsofmulticulturalcounselingstudy/articles/section1/Article23.pdf> (Accessed: 10 July 2012)

Grove, J. (2011) 'Widening access: are we imposing middle-class values on everyone?' *Times Higher*, 21 July [Online]. Available at:

<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/416881.article> (Accessed: 6 April 2013)

Grove, J. (2012a) 'Not dead yet: Aimhigher's aims live on', *Times Higher*, 5 January [Online]. Available at: <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/418566.article>

(Accessed: 5 April 2013)

Grove, J. (2012b) 'Wrong statistic' blamed for Aimhigher's fall', *Times Higher*, 5 January [Online]. Available at: <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/418597.article> (Accessed: 6 April 2013)

Grove, J. (2013) 'Aimhigher 2: this time it's slimmer', *Times Higher*, 7 March [Online]. Available at: <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/news/aimhigher-2-this-time-its-slimmer/2002359.article> (Accessed: 5 April 2013)

Guest, G. and MacQueen, K. (Eds.) (2006) *Handbook for team-based qualitative research*. Plymouth: Altamira Press

Guishard-Pine, J., McCall, S. and Hamilton, L. (2007) *Understanding looked after children: psychology for foster care*. London: Jessica Kingsley

Gullotta, T. (2008) A blueprint for promoting academic and social competence in after-school programs, *Dawsonera* [Online]. Available at: <http://www.dawsonera.com/depp/reader/protected/external/AbstractView/S9780387799209> (Accessed: 21 March 2012)

Gundersen, K. (2010) 'Reducing behaviour problems in young people through social competence programmes', *The International Journal of Emotional Education*, 2 (2), pp. 48-66 [Online]. Available at: http://brage.bibsys.no/diakon/bitstream/URN:NBN:no-bibsys_brage_16096/1/ENSECV2I2P4.pdf (Accessed on 13 March 2013)

Gutherson, P., Davies, H. and Daszkiewicz, T. (2011) *Achieving successful outcomes through Alternative Education Provision: an international literature review*, CfBT Education Trust [Online]. Available at: [http://www.cfbt.com/evidenceforeducation/pdf/5671_AEP\(Report\)_v3.pdf](http://www.cfbt.com/evidenceforeducation/pdf/5671_AEP(Report)_v3.pdf) (Accessed: 8 April 2013)

Haefel, G. and Grigorenko, E. (2007) 'Cognitive vulnerability to depression: exploring risk and resilience', *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, 16(2),

pp.435-48, *PubMed* [Online]. Available at:

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17349517> (Accessed: 28 March 2013)

Halcomb, E. and Davidson, P. (2006) 'Is verbatim transcription of interview data always necessary?' *Journal of Applied Nursing Research*, 19 (1), pp. 38-42

Halstead, P. (2012) 'It saddens me to see young, vulnerable people having their lives made harder', *The Guardian*, 21 January [Online]

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/jan/21/young-vulnerable-people-lives-harder> (Accessed: 29 March 2013)

Hamada, J. (2012) 'Who needs a place at university anyway?' *The Guardian*, 17 August [Online]. Available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/analysis-and-features/who-needs-a-place-at-university-anyway-8054002.html> (Accessed: 20 March 2012)

Hammersley, M. (1989) *The dilemma of qualitative method: Herbert Blumer and the Chicago tradition*. London: Routledge

Hammond, W. (2011) *Resiliency: a paradigm shift from "at risk" to "at potential": Positively youthful social work with youth*, Keynote speech, March 16. Lethbridge, Alberta [Online]. Available at:

<https://www.ucalgary.ca/fswsouth/files/fswsouth/Pages%201-14.pdf> (Accessed: 28 March 2013)

Harden, J., Backett-Milburn, K., Hill, M., MacLean, A. (2010) 'Oh, what a tangled web we weave: experience of doing 'multiple' perspectives' research in families', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 13 (5), pp. 441-452

Hardgrove, A., Enenajor, A., Lee, A. (2011) *Risk and childhood poverty: notes from theory and research*, Young Lives technical note no. 22 [Online]. Available at:

http://www.younglives.org.uk/files/technical-notes/tn22_risk-and-childhood-poverty_nov2011 (Accessed: 7 April 2013)

Harker, R. (2012) *Children in care in England: Statistics. Outcomes for Children looked After by Local Authorities in England, as at 31 March 2011*. DfE [Online]. Available at: <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/> (Accessed: 1 March 2013)

Harker, R. M., Dobel-Ober, D., Berridge, D. and Sinclair, R. (2006) 'More than the sum of its parts? Inter-professional working in the education of looked after children', *Children and Society*, 18 (3), pp. 179-193, *Wiley Online Library* [Online] Available at: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com> (Accessed 11 March 2013)

Harris, Victoria (2009) *How do young people experience the transition from being a looked after child to living independently and how can it be improved in the eyes of the young people using the service? Sharing our experience. Practitioner-led research 2008-2009, PLR0809/117*. DERA [Online] Available at: <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/2794/1/PLR0809117.pdf> (Accessed: 10 March 2013).

Harrison, N. (2012a) 'The mismeasure of participation: how choosing the wrong statistic helped seal the fate of Aimhigher', *Higher Education Review*, 45 (1), pp. 30-61 [Online]. Available at: <http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/17900/7/Mismeasure.pdf> (Accessed: 7 April 2013)

Harrison, N. (2012b) 'AccessHE: can collaborative outreach work continue in London after Aimhigher? Innovative Practice', *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning* 13 (Special Issue) [Online] Available at: <http://www.accesshe.ac.uk/yYdIxOu7/OU-Journal-fulltext.pdf> (Accessed: 8 April 2013)

Hart, A. and Aumann, K. (2009) *Helping children with complex needs bounce back: resilient therapy for parents and professionals*. London: Jessica Kingsley

Hatt, S. Furness, S. and Tate, J. (2010) *Who might benefit from Higher Education? Identifying potential: a study for Aimhigher West*. HEA [Online]. Available at: http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/evidencenet/AHW-Who_might_benefit_from_HE (Accessed: 8 April 2013)

Hatt, S. and Austin, M. (2005) 'The Messengers are the message: A study of the effects of employing Higher Education student ambassadors to work with school students', *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 7 (1), pp. 22-29

Hatt, S., Baxter, A. and Tate, J. (2005) 'Who benefits from widening participation? A study of targeting in the South West of England', *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 29 (4), pp. 341-351

Hatt, S., Baxter, A. and Tate, J. (2008) "The best government initiative in recent years'. Teachers' perceptions of the Aimhigher programme in the South West of England', *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 32 (2), 129-138

Hatt, S., Baxter, A. and Tate, J. (2009) "It was definitely a turning point!' A review of Aimhigher summer schools in the South West of England', *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 33(4), pp. 333-346

Hawley, P., Little, T. and Pasupathi, M. (2002) 'Winning friends and influencing peers: Strategies of peer influence in late childhood', *International Journal of Behavioural Development*, 26 (5), pp 466-473. *Taylor and Francis* [Online]. Available at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01650250143000427> (Accessed: 19 March 2013)

Henry, T. and Polson, K. (2007) *Working with Hard to Reach Young People –A Practical Guide*. The Scottish Government [Online]. Available at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/206127/0054786.pdf> (Accessed: 10 April 2013)

Higgs, L. (2012) 'Virtual school head role to be enshrined in law', *Children and Young People Now*, 12 December [Online]. Available at:
<http://www.cypnow.co.uk/cyp/news/1075702/virtual-school-head-role-enshrined-law>
(Accessed: 16 April 2013)

Higher Education Funding Council (2001a) *Strategies for learning and teaching in higher education*. Bristol: HEFCE

Higher Education Funding Council (2001b) *Strategies for widening participation in higher education: a guide to good practice*. Bristol: HEFCE

Higher Education Funding Council (2004) *Aimhigher: guidance notes for integration* [Online]. Available at:
<http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/pre2005/quality/reshaping/circular0401-aimhigher.pdf>
(Accessed on: 17 March 2013).

Higher Education Funding Council (2006) *Widening participation: a review*. Report to the Minister of State for Higher Education and Lifelong Learning. Bristol: HEFCE

Higher Education Funding Council (2007) *Higher education outreach: targeting disadvantaged learners*, Report 2007/12, Bristol: HEFCE

Higher Education Funding Council (2008) *Summer schools 2008-2010: guidance for Aimhigher partnerships: updated for the 2008-2011 programme*. Bristol: HEFCE

Higher Education Funding Council (2012a) *Aimhigher* [Online]. Available at:
<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/wp/recentwork/aimhigher/> (Accessed: 5 April 2013)

Higher Education Funding Council (2012b) *HEFCE statement on end of Aimhigher programme* [Online]. Available at:
<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/news/newsarchive/2010/name,62218,en.html> (Accessed: 8 April 2013)

- Hill, M. (1997) 'What children and young people say they want from social services', *Research, Policy and Planning*, 15, 17–27
- Hills, J. and Stewart, K. (2005) *Policies towards poverty, inequality and exclusion since 1997: summary*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation [Online]. Available at: <http://www.irf.org.uk/publications/policies-towards-poverty-inequality-and-exclusion-1997> (Accessed: 6 April 2013)
- Hodkinson, P. (2005) 'Insider research' in the study of youth cultures', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 8 (2), pp. 131 -/149 [Online]. Available at <http://www.paulhodkinson.co.uk/publications/hodkinsonjys.pdf>. Accessed 15.11.11 (Accessed: 1 June 2012)
- Howe, D, Brandon, M, Hinings, D and Schofield, G (1999) *Attachment theory: child maltreatment and family support. A practice and assessment model*. Basingstoke: Macmillan
- Humphrey, N. and Symes, W. (2010) 'Perceptions of social support and experience of bullying among pupils with autistic spectrum disorders in mainstream secondary schools', *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 25 (1), pp. 77-91, Taylor and Francis [Online]. Available at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/08856250903450855> (Accessed: 18 March 2013)
- Humphrey, N. and Squires, G. (2011) *Achievement for All National Evaluation: Final report*, Department for Education [Online]. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/184051/DFE-RR176.pdf (Accessed: 7 May 2013)
- Hurrell, S. (2010) *The Alignment of the Aimhigher national programme with looked after children and care leaver polic*, HEA [Online] Available at:

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/aim_higher/AH_alignment_report_care_policy.pdf (Accessed: 14 July 2012)

Hutchings, J. and Lane, E. (2005) 'Parenting and the development and prevention of child mental health problems', *Current Opinion in Psychiatry*, 18 (4), pp. 386-391, *PubMed* [Online] Available at: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16639130> (Accessed: 10 July 2012)

Israel, M. (2006) *Research ethics for social scientists: between ethical conduct and regulatory compliance*. London: Sage

Jacklin, A., Robinson, C., Torrance, H. (2006) 'When lack of data is data: do we really know who our looked after children are?', *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 21 (1), pp. 1-20

Jackson, S. and Sachdev, D. (2001) *Better education, better futures. research, practice and the views of young people in public care: summary*. Barnardo's [Online] Available at: http://www.barnardos.org.uk/better_education_better_futures_research_practice_and_the_views_of_young_people_in_public_care_summary-2.pdf (Accessed: 30 March 2013)

Jackson, S., Ajayi, S. and Quigley, M. (2005) *Going to university from care*. Institute of Education [Online]. Available at: [http://eprints.ioe.ac.uk/7011/1/Jackson2005Going\(Report\).pdf](http://eprints.ioe.ac.uk/7011/1/Jackson2005Going(Report).pdf) (Accessed: 19 March 2012)

Jackson, S. and Martin, P. (1999) 'Surviving the care system: education and resilience', *Journal of Adolescence*, 21 (5), pp. 569-583, *ScienceDirect* [Online]. Available at: <http://www.ScienceDirect.com/science/article/pii/S0140197198901786> (Accessed 13 March 2013)

Jarus T., Anaby D., Bart O., Engel-Yeger B. and Law, M. (2010) 'Childhood participation in after-school activities: what is to be expected?', *British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 73(8), pp. 344-350 [Online]. Available at:
<http://osot.ubc.ca/files/2010/09/Childhood-paticipation-in-after-school-activities.pdf>
(Accessed: 30 March 2013)

Jarvie, I. and Zamora-Bonilla, J. (2011) *The Sage handbook of the philosophy of social sciences*, Dawsonera [Online]. Available at:
<http://www.dawsonera.com/depp/reader/protected/external/AbstractView/S9781446209714> (Accessed: 27 March 2013)

Jindal-Snape, D. Miller, D. (2008) 'A challenge of living? understanding the psycho-social processes of the child during primary-secondary transition through resilience and self-esteem theories', *Educational Psychology Review*, 20 (3), pp. 217-236

Johnson, B. and Howard, S. (2007) 'Causal chain effects and turning points in young people's lives: a resilience perspective', *Journal of Student Wellbeing*, 1(2), pp. 1-15 [Online] . Available at:
<http://www.ojs.unisa.edu.au/index.php/JSW/article/viewFile/171/138> (Accessed: 20 March 2013)

Jones, R. and Thomas, L. (2005) 'The 2003 UK Government Higher Education White Paper: a critical assessment of its implications for the access and widening participation agenda', *Journal of Education Policy*, 20 (5), pp. 615-30

Juby, C. and Rycraft, J. (2004) 'Family preservation strategies for families in poverty', *Families in Society*, 85 (4), pp. 581-587 [Online] Available at:
<http://www.familiesinsociety.org/Show.asp?docid=1847> (Accessed: 11 July 2012)

Judkins, M., Golden, S., Ireland, E. and Morris, M. (2005) *Implementing Aimhigher: Excellence Challenge. The Experiences of Ten Partnerships*. Research Report RR646. DfE [Online]. Available at:

<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/RR646.pdf>

(Accessed: 16 March 2013)

Kallenbach, M. (2003) 'We'll scrap 50pc student target, Tories promise education', *The Daily Telegraph*, 26 June, [Online] Available at

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1434068/Yesterday-in-Parliament.html>

(Accessed 6 June 2012)

Kassem, D., Mufti, E. and Robinson, J. (Eds.) (2006) *Education studies: issues and critical perspective*. Berkshire: Open University Press

Katz, M. (1997) *On playing a poor hand well: insights from the lives of those who have overcome childhood risks and adversities*. New York: Norton

Kendall, S., Wilkin, A., Kinder, K., Gulliver, C., Harland, J., Martin, K. and White, R.

(2007) *Effective alternative provision: research report No DCSF-RW002*. Department for Children, Schools and Families [Online]. Available at:

<http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/6739/1/DCSF-RW002.pdf> (Accessed: 10 March 2013)

Kennedy, H. (2009) *Unfinished business in widening participation: the end of the beginning*. Full text of the Fircroft College Centenary Lecture, given by Baroness Helena Kennedy, at the University of Birmingham on 8 June 2009 [Online]. Available at:

http://www.hkf.org.uk/about_news_detail.php?id=30 (Accessed: 1 January 2012)

Kerrigan and Church (2011) *"I can do that too if I work hard": a longitudinal study of Aimhigher Leicester City + Leicestershire learners*. Aimhigher Leicester City and Leicestershire [Online]. Available at:

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/aim_higher/CEP_report_Leicestershire_finalPDF.pdf (Accessed: 6 April 2013)

Kewin, J., Hughes, T., Sheen, J. (2010) *Learner progression matrix: progression for apprentices*. Aimhigher West Area Partnership report

Kilpatrick, R., McCartan, C. and McKeown, P. (2007) *Out of the Box – Alternative Education Provision (AEP) in Northern Ireland*. Research report N45. Department of Education [Online]. Available at: http://www.deni.gov.uk/no_45_final-3.pdf (Accessed: 17 March 2013)

King, G., Cathers, T., Brown, E., Specht, J., Willoughby, C., Polgar, J., Mackinnon, E., Smith, L., Havens, L. (2003) 'Turning Points and Protective Processes in the Lives of People With Chronic Disabilities', *Qualitative Health Research*, 13 (2), pp. 184-206

King, G., Brown, E. and Smith, L. (2003) *Resilience: Learning from People With Disabilities and Turning Points in Their Lives*. Westport: Praeger Publishers

Kingston, E. (2008) 'Emotional competence and drop-out rates in higher education', *Education and Training*, 50 (2), pp. 128-139.

Kirkless Metropolitan Council (2010) *Looked After Children in Kirklees Aimhigher* [Online]. Available at: <http://www2.kirklees.gov.uk/childrenandfamilies/AimHigher/AimHigher.html> (Accessed: 20 June 2012)

Knox, H., McGillivray, A. (2005) 'Students helping students', in Acland, A. (Ed.) *Access, retention and employability: transforming higher education*. London: FACE, pp. 57-61

Kohli, R. (2001) 'Social work with unaccompanied asylum seeking young people', *Forced Migration Review*, 12 (1), pp. 31–33 [Online]. Available at: <http://www.fmreview.org/sites/fmr/files/FMRdownloads/en/FMRpdfs/FMR12/fmr12.11.pdf> (Accessed: 9 March 2013)

Kohli, R. (2006) 'The sound of silence: Listening to what unaccompanied asylum-seeking children say and do not say', *British Journal of Social Work*, 36 (5), pp.707-721, *SocINDEX with Full Text* [Online]. Available at: <http://0-ehis.ebscohost.com.brum.beds.ac.uk/> (Accessed: 10 July 2012)

Kvale, S. and Brinkman, S. (2009) *Interviews: learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*. London: Sage

Kvittingen, A. (2010) *Negotiating childhood: age assessment in the UK asylum system*. Working paper Series No 67. University of Oxford: Refugee Studies Centre [Online]. Available at: http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/publications/working-papers-folder_contents/RSCworkingpaper67.pdf

Lamb, B. (2011) 'Can Achievement for All deliver progress for children with SEN?' *SEN Magazine*, 21 November [Online]. Available at: <http://www.senmagazine.co.uk/articles/407-can-achievement-for-all-deliver-progress-for-children-with-sen> (Accessed: 8 May 2013)

Langford, P. (2005) *Vygotsky's developmental and educational psychology*. Hove: Psychology Press

Law, M. (2002). 'Participation in the occupations of everyday life: distinguished Scholar Lecture', *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 56, pp. 640–649 [Online]. Available at: <http://ajot.aotapress.net/content/56/6/640.full.pdf> (Accessed: 30 March 2013)

Layder, D. (1993) *New strategies in social research: an introduction and guide*. Cambridge: Polity Press

Lee, K. (2003) 'Maternal coping skills as a moderator between depression and stressful life events: effects on children's behavioural problems in an intervention program', *Journal of Child and Family studies*, 12 (4), 425-437 *SocINDEX with Full Text* [Online]. Available at: <http://0-ehis.ebscohost.com.brum.beds.ac.uk/> (Accessed: 10 July 2012)

Leonard, C. (2011) *Care leavers in Further Education: the lost cohort. Research report for Aimhigher West area partnership*. Aimhigher West

Lever, C. (2011) *Understanding challenging behaviour in inclusive classrooms*. Harlow: Longman

Lightsey, O. (2005) 'Resilience, meaning and wellbeing'. *The Counselling Psychologist*, 34 (10), pp. 96-107, *Sage Journals* [Online]. Available at: <http://tcp.sagepub.com/content/34/1/96.full.pdf+html> (Accessed: 15 July 2012)

Li-Grining, C, Pittman, L, and Chase-Lansdale, P. (2003) 'Heterogeneity among young children in low-income, urban communities: the role of individual differences in temperament', *Conference Papers - American Sociological Association*, pp. 1-36, *SocINDEX with Full Text*, EBSCOhost [Online]. Available at: <http://0-ehis.ebscohost.com.brum.beds.ac.uk> (Accessed: 21 March 2013)

Luthar, S, Cicchetti, D, and Becker, B (2000) 'The construct of resilience: A critical evaluation and guidelines for future work', *Child Development*, 71 (3), pp. 543-562, *Social Sciences Citation Index*, EBSCOhost [Online]. Available at: <http://0-ehis.ebscohost.com.brum.beds.ac.uk> (Accessed: 23 March 2013)

Luthar, S. (2003) *Resilience and vulnerability: adaptation in the context of childhood adversities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Luthar, S. (2006) 'Resilience in development: a synthesis across five decades', in Cicchetti, D. and Cohen, D. (Eds) *Developmental psychopathology: risk, disorder and adaptation*, 2nd Ed. New York: Wiley, pp. 739-795

MacConvill, R. and Rae, T. (2012) *Building happiness, resilience and motivation in adolescents: a positive psychology curriculum for well-being*. London: Jessica Kingsley

Malti, T. and Perren, S. (2012) 'Social competence', *Encyclopedia of Adolescence* (n.d.), pp.332-340. *ScienceDirect* [Online] Available at: <http://0-ehis.ebscohost.com.brum.beds.ac.uk> (Accessed: 21 March 2013)

Mancini, A. and Bonanno, G. (2009) 'Predictors and parameters of resilience to loss: toward an individual differences model', *Journal of Personality*, 77 (6), pp. 1805-1831

Maras, P., Carmichael, K., Patel, S., & Wills, J. (2007) "'The trouble with Year 10": 13-16 year old school students' attitudes to higher education', *Social Psychology of Education*, 10 (3), pp. 375-397

Maras, P., Gudaityte, A. and Potterton, A. (2009) 'Identity, self concept and students' aspirations and behaviour', *TMC Academic Journal*, 2009, 4(1), pp.59-61 [Online].

Available at: http://www.tmc.edu.sg/pdf_files/acadjournal/V4I1/09%20-%20Identity,%20self%20concept%20-%20Maras%20et%20al%20-%20Final.pdf

(Accessed: 8 April 2013)

Markle, D., West, R. and Rich, P. (2011) 'Beyond Transcription: Technology, Change, and Refinement of Method', *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 12 (3) [Online]. Available at: <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1564/3249> (Accessed: 11 April 2013)

Marks, D. and Yardley, L. (2004) *Content and thematic analysis. Research methods for clinical and health psychology*. London: Sage

Marshall, K. (2001) *Bridging the resilience gap: research to practice*. National Resilience Resource centre, University of Minnesota and the Centre for the Application of Prevention Technologies [Online]. Available at:

<http://www.cce.umn.edu/pdfs/nrrc/bridge.pdf> (Accessed: 29 March 2013)

Marsiglia, F., Miles, B., Dustman, P., Sills, S (2002) 'Ties that protect', *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, 11 (3-4), pp.191-220

Martin, K. and White, R. (2012) *Alternative provision for young people with special educational needs*. LGA Research Report, NFER [Online]. Available at:

<http://www.nfer.ac.uk/nfer/publications/APSN02/APSN02.pdf> (Accessed: 14 March 2013)

Martin, P. and Jackson, S. (2002) 'Educational success for children in public care: advice from a group of high achievers', *Child & Family Social Work*, [7\(2\)](#), pp. 121–130, *Wiley Online Library* [Online]. Available at: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com> (Accessed 11 March 2013)

Maruyama, M. (1981) 'Endogenous research: rationale', in Reason, P. and Rowan, J. (Eds) *Human Inquiry: A sourcebook for new paradigm research*. Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, pp. 227-238

Masten, A. (2001) 'Ordinary magic: resilience process in development', *American Psychologist*, 56 (3), pp. 227-38

Masten, A. (2013) *Profile page*. Institute of Child Development, University of Minnesota [Online]. Available at: <http://www.cehd.umn.edu/icd/people/faculty/cpsy/Masten.html> (Accessed: 29 March 2013)

Masten, A. and Coatsworth, J. (1998) 'The development of competence in favourable and unfavourable environments', *American Psychologist*, 53 (2), pp. 205-220. Available at: <http://www.udel.edu/educ/gottfredson/intel/pdf-duplicates%3F/masten.pdf> (Accessed on: 2 August 2012)

Masten, A. and Powell, J. (2003) 'A resilience framework for research, policy and practice', in Luthar, S. (Ed.) *Resilience and vulnerability: adaptation in the context of childhood adversities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-28

Masten, A., Best, K., Garmezy, N. (1990) 'Resilience and development: contributions from the study of children who overcome adversity', *Development and Psychopathology*, 2, pp. 425-444, *Cambridge Journals* [Online]. Available at: <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=2490828> (Accessed: 1 January 2012)

Matthews, H. (2001) *Children and Community Regeneration: Creating Better Neighbourhoods*. London: Save the Children

May, H. (2006) *Information Collection and Dissemination Practices for Learners with Specific Learning Differences across the Education Sector: The Impact and Consequential Intellectual Loss to Education and Employment*. HEA [Online]. Available at: <http://www.achieveability.org.uk/files/1259159844/hea-aa-research-report.pdf> (Accessed: 8 April 2013)

McCaig, C. and Bowers-Brown, T. (2007) *Aimhigher: achieving social justice?* Conference Paper. The British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, Institute of Education, University of London, 5-8 September [Online]. Available at: <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/168534.htm> (Accessed: 5 April 2013)

McLeod, A. (2007) 'Whose agenda? Issues of power and relationship when listening to looked-after young people', *Child & Family Social Work*, 12 (3), pp. 278–286, Wiley Online Library [Online] Available at: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1365-2206.2007.00493.x/pdf> (Accessed: 22 March 2013)

McLinden, M. (2003) 'Children into university: an outreach project working with school years 8-13', in Saunders, D., Payne, R., Jones, H., Mason, A. and Storan, J. (Eds) *Attracting and retaining learners; policy and practice perspectives*. London: FACE, pp. 160-168.

McNaught. C. and Lam, P. (2010) 'Using Wordle as a Supplementary Research Tool', *The Qualitative Report*, 15 (3), pp. 630-643 [Online]. Available at: <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR15-3/mcnaught.pdf> (Accessed: 10 April 2013)

McNeil, B., Reeder, N. and Rich, J. (2012) *A framework of outcomes for young people*. The Young Foundation. DfE [Online]. Available at:

https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/Framework_of_Outcomes_for_Young_People.pdf (Accessed: 28 March 2013)

McNeil, C. (2012) *The politics of disadvantage: New Labour, social exclusion and post-crash Britain*. The Lankellychase Foundation [Online]. Available at: http://www.lankellychase.org.uk/resources/publications/193_the_politics_of_disadvantage (Accessed: 6 April 2013)

McNiff, J. and Whitehead, J. (2000) *Action research in organisations*. London: Routledge

Melrose, M. (2002) 'Labour pains: Some considerations on the difficulties of researching juvenile prostitution', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 5 (4) pp. 333-351, *SocINDEX with Full Text, Ebscohost* [Online]. Available at <http://0-ejournals.ebsco.com.br/brum.beds.ac.uk/direct.asp?ArticleID=BLGJX2GEU1AF5N7YMPNW> (Accessed 15 November 2011)

Melrose, M. and Brodie, I. (2000) *Vulnerable young people and their vulnerability to drug misuse in Drugscope and Department of Health Vulnerable young people and drugs: opportunities to tackle inequalities*. Research to Practice 2. London: DrugScope.

Mentoring and Befriending Foundation (2010) *Peer mentoring in schools: a review of the evidence base of the benefits of peer mentoring in schools including findings from the MBF outcomes measurement programme*. London: Mentoring and Befriending Foundation.

[Mistry, R., Vandewater, E., Huston, A., McLoyd, V.](#) (2002) 'Economic wellbeing and children's social adjustment: the role of family process in an ethnically diverse low-income sample', *Child Development*, 73 (3), pp. 935-951, *PubMed* [Online]. Available at: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12038561> (Accessed: 10 July 2012)

Mitchell, F. (2003) 'The social services response to unaccompanied children in England', *Child and Family Social Work*, 8 (3), pp. 179-189.

Mitchell, P. (2011) 'Evidence-based practice in real-world services for young people with complex needs: New opportunities suggested by recent implementation science', *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33 (2), pp. 207-216, ScienceDirect [Online] . Available at: <http://www.ScienceDirect.com/science/article/pii/S0190740910003373> (Accessed on 19 March 2013)

Mohaupt, S. (2008) 'Review article: resilience and social exclusion', *Social Policy and Society*, 8 (1), pp. 63-71, *SocINDEX with Full Text* [Online]. Available at: <http://0-ehis.ebscohost.com.brum.beds.ac.uk/> (Accessed: 10 July 2012)

Morrison Gutman, I. and Akerman, R. (2008) *Determinants of aspirations: research brief*. Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning Institute of Education. DfE [Online] Available at: <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eorderingdownload/dcsf-wbl-03-08.pdf> (Accessed on 11 march 2013)

Mowlam, A., Creegan, C. (2008) *What are today's social evils? The voices of unheard groups*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation [Online]. Available at: <http://www.socialevils.org.uk/documents/social-evils-natcen-report.pdf> (Accessed: 1 May 2012)

Murray, J. (2012) 'ICT at school is boring, children say', *The Guardian*, 9 January [Online] Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2012/jan/09/children-computer-lessons> (Accessed on: 16 March 2013)

Murray, J. (2013) 'Children with disabilities illegally excluded from school', *The Guardian*, 18 February [Online]. Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2013/feb/18/children-with-disabilities-illegally-excluded> (Accessed: 6 April 2013)

Narayan, D., Chambers, R., Shash, M. and Petesh, P. (2000) *Voices of the poor: crying out for change*. Washington: The World Bank [Online]. Available at: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2000/01/1047447/voices-poor-crying-out-change> (Accessed: 1 June 2012)

NatCen Social Research (2013) National Citizen Service Evaluation: About this study [Online]. Available at: <http://www.natcen.ac.uk/study/national-citizen-service-evaluation#authors> (Accessed: 8 May 2013)

National Care Advisory Service. (2010). *From Care2Work: Creating opportunities and raising aspirations* [Online]. Available at: <http://resources.leavingcare.org/uploads/607cec4aaf32ce77bd2d7fed7b66ae5d.pdf> (Accessed: 23 March 2013).

National Care Advisory Service (2011) *Statistical briefing: Looked after children and care leavers 2011* [Online]. Available at: <http://resources.leavingcare.org/uploads/e7186fad64003f1f923d30a80243e38f.pdf> (Accessed: 13 April 2013)

National Care Advisory Service (2012) *Funding leaving care. Making the cut: one year on* [Online]. Available at: <http://www.catch-22.org.uk/Files/Funding-leaving-care---Making-the-cut-one-year-on.pdf?id=34589277-49a4-4aa7-9e56-a0d100f841be> (Accessed: 30 March 2013)

National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (2013) '[Local campaigns against cuts to young people's services](#)', *NCVYS financial monitoring blog*, 5 February. [Online] Available at: <http://ncvyspolicy.wordpress.com/category/funding-for-young-people-and-the-voluntary-and-community-sector/> (Accessed: 30 March 2013)

National Foundation for Educational Research (2012) *Vulnerable groups* [Online]. Available at: <http://www.nfer.ac.uk/what-we-do/evaluations/vulnerable-groups.cfm> (Accessed: 10 April 2013)

National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (2011). *Looked after children and young people: public health guidance 28*. NICE [Online]. Available at: <http://www.nice.org.uk/nicemedia/live/13244/51173/51173.pdf> (Accessed: 17 March 2013)

National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (2012) *Gillick competency and Fraser guidelines* [Online]. Available at: http://www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/research/questions/gillick_wda61289.html#How_is_Gillick_competency_assessed? (Accessed: 3 March 2012)

National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (2013) *Statistics on looked after children: March 2013* [Online]. Available at: http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/resourcesforprofessionals/lookedafterchildren/statistics_wda88009.html (Accessed: 6 April 2013)

NCH - The Bridge Child Care Development Service (2007) *Literature Review: Resilience in Children and Young People*. Action for Children [Online] Available at: http://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/media/145693/resilience_in_children_in_young_people.pdf (Accessed: 29 March 2013)

Neff, K. and McGehee, P. (2009) 'Self-compassion and psychological resilience among adolescents and young adults', *Self and Identity*, 9 (3), pp. 225 - 240 [Online] Available at: <https://webpace.utexas.edu/neffk/pubs/NeffandMcGee.pdf> (Accessed: 29 March 2013)

Neuman, W. (2000) *Social Research methods: qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon

- Newman, T. (2004) *What works in building resilience? Research summary*. Barnardo's [Online] Available at:
http://www.barnardos.org.uk/what_works_in_building_resilience_-_summary_1_.pdf (Accessed: 29 March 2013)
- Norgate, R., Warhurst, A., Hayden, C., Osboren, C. and Trail, M. (2012). 'Social workers' perspectives on the placement instability of looked after children', *Adoption and Fostering Journal*, 36 (2), pp. 4-18 (5)
- Northern, S. (2011) 'Looked-after children let down by the education system', *The Guardian*, 19 September [Online] Available at:
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/sep/19/children-in-care-education-system> (Accessed: 30 March 2013)
- O'Byrne, D. (2011) *Introducing sociological theory*. Dawsonera [Online] Available at:
<http://www.dawsonera.com/depp/reader/protected/external/AbstractView/S9781408203897> (Accessed: 27 March 2013)
- O'Neale, V. (2000) *Excellence, not excuses: inspections of services for ethnic minority children and families*. London: Department of Health, Social Services Inspectorate
- O'Regan, F. (2010) 'Exclusion from school and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder', *The International Journal of Emotional Education*, 2 (2), pp. 3-18 [Online]. Available at:
<http://www.fintanoregan.com/wp-content/ENSECV2I2P1.pdf> (Accessed: 18 March 2013)
- Office for Fair Access (2013) *Introducing access agreements* [Online]. Available at:
<http://www.offa.org.uk/universities-and-colleges/introducing-access-agreements/> (Accessed: 5 April 2013)
- Oliver, K, Collin, P., Burns, J. and Nicholas, J. (2006) 'Building resilience in young people through meaningful participation', *Australian e-Journal for the Advancement of Mental*

Health 5(1). Available at: www.auseinet.com/journal/vol5iss1/oliver.pdf (Accessed: 30 March 2013)

Orenstein, M. (2012) *Smart but stuck: how resilience frees imprisoned intelligence from learning disabilities*, 2nd ed. Dawsonera [Online]. Available at: <http://www.dawsonera.com/depp/reader/protected/direct/RentalRequest,rentalRequest.sdirect> (Accessed: 28 March 2013)

Orthner, D., Jones-Sanpei, H. and Williamson, S. (2004) 'The resilience and strength of low-income families', *Family Relations*, 53 (2), *Special Issue on Low-Income and Working-Poor Families*, pp. 159-167 SocINDEX with Full Text [Online] Available at: <http://0-ehis.ebscohost.com.brum.beds.ac.uk/> (Accessed: 10 July 2012)

Osler, A. (2002) *Not a problem? Girls and school exclusion*. London: National Children's Bureau Enterprises

Ou, S. (2005) 'Pathways of long-term effects of an early intervention programme on educational attainment: findings from the Chicago longitudinal study', *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 26 (5), 578-611

Owen, C. and Statham, J. (2009) *Disproportionality in child welfare: the prevalence of black and minority ethnic children within the 'looked after' and 'children in need' populations and on child protection registers in England*, Institute of Education [Online]. Available at: <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/DCSF-RR124.pdf> (Accessed: 13 April 2013)

Papero, A. (2005) 'Is early, high quality daycare an asset for the children of low income, depressed mothers?', *Developmental Review*, 25 (2), pp. 181-211. *Science Direct* [Online] Available at: <http://www.ScienceDirect.com/science/article/pii/S0273229704000504> (Accessed: 29 March 2013)

Parlett, M. and Hamilton, D. (1987) 'Evaluation as illumination: a new approach to the study of innovatory programs', in Murphy, R. and Torrance, H. (Eds) *Evaluating Education: Issues and Methods*. London, Paul Chapman, pp.57–73

Passy, R. (2011) *Supporting and encouraging: Aimhigher's role in widening participation*. Conference paper. Discourse, Power and Resistance Conference, University of Plymouth 13-15 April. HEA [Online]. Available at: http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/aim_higher/AHPP_Supporting_encouraging_AH_role.pdf (Accessed: 5 April 2013)

Passy, R., Morris, M., Waldman, J. (2009) *Evaluation of the impact of Aimhigher and widening participation outreach programmes on learner attainment and progression*. Interim report. NFER

Peck, S., Roeser, R., Zarrett, N. and Eccles, J. (2008) 'Exploring the roles of extracurricular activity quantity and quality in the educational resilience of vulnerable adolescents: variable- and pattern-centered approaches', *Journal of Social Issues*, 64(1), pp. 135–156, *National Centre for Biotechnology Information* [Online]. Available at: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2699299/pdf/nihms108345.pdf> (Accessed: 30 March 2013)

Pemberton, C. (2012) 'Looked-after children numbers hit 15-year high', *Community Care*, 25 September [Online]. Available at: <http://www.communitycare.co.uk/blogs/childrens-services-blog/2012/09/looked-after-children-numbers-hit-15-year-high.html> (Accessed: 29 March 2013)

Pennel, H., West, A., Hind, A. (2005) *Survey of higher education providers 2004: evaluation of Aimhigher. Excellence challenge*. London: DfES

Peterson, J., Duncan, N., Canady, K. (2009) 'A Longitudinal Study of Negative Life Events, Stress, and School Experiences of Gifted Youth', *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 53 (1), pp. 34-49

Petrie, S., Fiorelli, S., O'Donnell, K (2006) "If we help you what will change?" - participatory research with young people', *The Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law*, 28 (1), pp. 31-45

Piercy, H. and Hargate, M. (2004) 'Social research on the under-16s: a consideration of the issues from a UK perspective', *Journal of Child Healthcare*, 8 (4), pp. 253–263

Porteous, D. (2007) 'The prevention of youth crime: a risky business?', on Thom, B., Sales, R. and Pearce, J. (Eds) *Growing up with risk*. University of Bristol: The Policy Press, pp. 259-276

Poulin, F., McGovern-Murphy, F., Chan, A. and Capuano, F. (2012) 'Participation in organized leisure activities as a context for the development of social competence among preschool children', *Journal of Educational and Developmental Psychology*, 2(2), pp. 32-41, EBSCOhost [Online]. Available at: <http://0-ehis.ebscohost.com.brum.beds.ac.uk> (Accessed: 13 March 2013)

Prowse, M. (2008) *Draft Report prepared for EPIC*. Social Cohesion Practical Experiences and Initiatives (EPIC) [Online]. Available at: <http://epic.programaeurosocial.eu/files/19-ficha-completa-eng.pdf> (Accessed: 8 April 2013)

Raffo, C., Dyson, A., Gunter, H., Hall, D. and Jones, L. (2007) *A review of research on the links between education and poverty* Joseph Rowntree Foundation [Online]. Available at: <http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/review-research-links-between-education-and-poverty> (Accessed: 6 April 2013)

Reay, D (2001) 'Finding or losing yourself? Working class relationships to education', *Journal of Education Policy*, 16 (4), pp. 333-346

Reay, D (2006) 'The zombie stalking English schools: social class and educational inequality', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 54 (3), pp. 288-307

Reay, D. (2012) *Researching class in higher education*, British Educational Research Association online resource. BERA [Online] Available at:
<http://www.bera.ac.uk/resources/researching-class-higher-education> (Accessed: 6 April 2013)

Refugee Support Network (2012) *"I just want to study": access to higher education for young refugees and asylum seekers* [Online]. Available at:
<http://refugeesupportnetwork.org/sites/all/sites/default/files/files/l%20just%20want%20to%20study.pdf> (Accessed on 12 March 2013)

Reidy, T. (2012) 'Excluded pupils find few opportunities outside mainstream state school', *The Guardian*, 2 December [Online]. Available at:
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2012/dec/02/excluded-pupils-few-chances-outside-school> (Accessed: 6 April 2013)

Research in Practice (2009) *Promoting resilience in child care practice and policy*. Report No. 9. Darlington Hall Trust [Online]. Available at:
www.rip.org.uk/publications/welsh.asp (Accessed: 10 July 2012)

Rhea, B. (1981) *The future of the sociological classics*. London: Allen and Unwin

Rich, J. (2009) *Labels that disable – meeting the complex needs of children in residential care*. NICE [Online]. Available at:
<http://www.nice.org.uk/nicemedia/live/11879/47438/47438.pdf> (Accessed: 6 April 2013)

Richards, T. and Richards, L. (1995) 'Using hierarchical categories in qualitative data analysis', in Kelle, U. (Ed) *Computer-aided qualitative data analysis: theory, methods, and practice*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, pp. 80–95

Riddell, R. (2010) *Aspiration, identity and self-belief: snapshots of social structure at work*, Dawsonera [Online]. Available at: <http://www.dawsonera.com/depp/reader/protected/external/AbstractView/S9781858567563> (Accessed on 11 March 2013)

Roberts, Y. (2009) *Grit. The skills for success and how they are grown*. The Young Foundation [Online]. Available at: <http://youngfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/GRIT-The-skills-for-success-and-how-they-are-grown-2009.pdf> (Accessed: 20 July 2012)

Rodger, J. Burgess, M. (2011) *Qualitative evaluation of the Aimhigher Associates programme: pathfinder*. Report to HEFCE

Rose, D., Thornicroft, G., Pinfold, V. and Kassam, A. (2007) '250 labels used to stigmatise people with mental illness', *BMC Health Services Research*, 7, pp. 1-7, Available at: <http://www.biomedicalcentral.com/1472-6963/7/97> (Accessed 28 June 2012)

Roulston, K., deMarrais, K. and Lewis, J. (2003) 'Learning to interview in the social sciences', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 9 (4), pp.643-668 [Online]. Available at: https://entwicklungspolitik.uni-hohenheim.de/uploads/media/Day_5_-_Reading_text_1.pdf (Accessed: 14 April 2013)

Rouncefield-Swales, A. (2009) *Embedding Aimhigher in local authorities*: Report to Aimhigher West Area Partnership, HEA [Online] Available at: http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/aim_higher/AHW-Embedding_Aimhigher_in_LAs (Accessed: 6 April 2013)

Russel, S., Ryan, C., Toomey, R., Diaz, R., Sanchez, J. (2010) 'Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender and adolescent school victimisation: implications for young adult health and adjustment', *Journal of School Health*, 81 (5), pp. 223-230 [Online]. Available at: http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/ASHA_Article.pdf (Accessed: 14 July 2012)

Rutter, M. (1985) 'Resilience in the face of adversity: protective factors and resistance to psychiatric disorder', *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 147 (6), pp. 598-611 [Online]. Available at: <http://bjp.rcpsych.org/content/147/6/598.full.pdf> (Accessed: 1 February 2012)

Rutter, M. (1989) 'Pathways from childhood to adult life', *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 30 (1), pp 23-51, Wiley Online Library [Online]. Available at: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1469-7610.1989.tb00768.x/pdf> (Accessed: 1 February 2012)

Rutter, M. (1990) 'Psychosocial resilience and protective mechanisms', in Rolf, J., Masten, A., Cicchetti, D., Neuchterlein, K. and Weintraub, S. (Eds), *Risk and protective factors in the development of psychopathology*. New York: Cambridge University press, pp. 181-214

Rutter, M. (1996). 'Transitions and turning points in developmental psychopathology: As applied to the age span between childhood and mid – adulthood', *International Journal of Behavioural Development*, 19(3), pp. 603-636, *Sage Journals* [Online] Available at: <http://jbd.sagepub.com/content/19/3/603.full.pdf+html> (Accessed: 29 March 2013)

Rutter, M. (1999) 'Resilience concepts and findings: implications for family therapy', *Journal of family therapy*, 21 (2), pp. 119-44. *Wiley Online Library* [Online] Available at: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1467-6427.00108/pdf> (Accessed: 28 March 2013)

Rutter, M. and Madge, N. (1976) *Cycles of disadvantage: a review of research*. London: Heinmann

Ryan, M. (2012) *How to make relationships matter to looked after young people: a handbook*. The National Children's Bureau [Online]. Available at: http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/541278/rema_hand_web.pdf (Accessed: 18 March 2013)

Saldaña, J. (2011) *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. London: Sage

Saleebey, D. (Ed.) (1997) *The Strengths perspective in social work practice*, 2nd Ed. New York: Longman

Sameroff, A. And Seifer, R. (1983) 'Familial risk and child competence', *Child Development*, 54 (5), pp. 1254-1268 [Online]. Available at: <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/psychology/courses/3615/Readings/sameroffseifer.pdf> (Accessed: 1 March 2012)

Sanders, M. and Jordan, W. (Eds) (2000) *Schooling students placed at risk: research, policy, and practice in the education of poor and minority adolescents*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates

Scarr, S. and McCartney, K. (1983) 'How People Make Their Own Environments: A Theory of Genotype → Environment Effects', *Child Development*, 54 (2), pp. 425-435 [Online]. Available at: http://defiant.ssc.uwo.ca/undergraduate/psych3440g/readings/Scarr198scar_mc.pdf (Accessed: 1 May 2013)

Schmied, V. and Tully, L. (2009) *Effective strategies and interventions for adolescents in a child protection context: literature review*. New South Wales department for community services [Online]. Available at:

http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/assets/main/documents/effective_adolescent_strategies.pdf (Accessed: 28 March 2013)

Schmueker, K. (2013) *Recession pushes more young single people below minimum income standard*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation blog, 13 April [Online]. Available at: <http://www.jrf.org.uk/blog/2013/04/recession-minimum-income-standard> (Accessed: 5 May 2013)

Schofield, G. (2001) 'Resilience and family placement: a lifespan perspective', *Adoption and Fostering*, 25 (3), pp. 6-19, *Sage Journals* [Online] Available at: <http://aaf.sagepub.com/content/25/3/6.full.pdf+html> (Accessed: 20 July 2012)

Schofield, G. (2003) *Part of the family. Pathways through foster care*. London: BAAF

Schofield, G. and Beek, M. (2005) 'Risk and resilience in long-term foster care', *British Journal of Social Work*, 35 (8), p1283 - 1301, *EBSCOhost Online*. Available at: <http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/articles/19604067/risk-resilience-long-term-foster-care> (Accessed: 9 August 2012)

Schofield, G., Moldestad, B., Höjer, I., Ward, E., Skilbred, D., Young, J. and Havik, T. (2011) 'Managing loss and a threatened identity: experiences of parents of children growing up in foster care, the perspectives of their social workers and implications for practice', *British Journal of Social Work*, 41 (1), pp.74-92. *SocINDEX with Full Text* [Online] Available at: <http://0-ehis.ebscohost.com.brum.beds.ac.uk/> (Accessed on: 10 March 2013)

Schoon, I. (2006) *Risk and resilience: adaptation in changing times*. Cambridge: The Cambridge University Press

Schwandt, T. (2007) *The Sage Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry*, 3rd Ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage

Scottish Executive (2007) *Looked after children and young people: we can do and must do better* [Online]. Available at:

<http://www.scottishexecutive.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/154554/0041493.pdf> (Accessed: 14 March 2013)

Settersten, R. (1999) *Lives in time and place: the problems and promises of developmental science*, Society and ageing series. New York: Baywood

Shapiro (2004) 'Can poetry be data? Potential relationships between poetry and research', *Families, systems and health*, Vol 22 (2), pp. 171-177 [Online]. Available at:

<http://psycnet.apa.org/index.cfm?fa=buy.optionToBuy&uid=2004-16968-005>

(Accessed: 1 March 2012)

Sheeran, Y., Brown, B. and Baker, S. (2007) 'Conflicting philosophies of inclusion: the contestation of knowledge in widening participation', *London Review of Education* 5, (3), pp. 249-263

Shepherd, J. (2010) 'Cap on student numbers means one in three applicants will not get university places', *The Guardian*, 14 January [Online]. Available at:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2010/jan/14/cap-student-numbers-unprecedented-demand> (Accessed: 9 April 2013)

Sinclair, I. (2005) *Fostering now: messages from research*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Slack, K., Vigurs, K. (2006) *Evaluation of the Robot Competition. Aimhigher Lincolnshire and Rutland Report* [Online]. Available at [http://www.staffs.ac.uk/access-](http://www.staffs.ac.uk/access-studies/docs/FinalRobotCompetitionReport3_1.pdf)

[studies/docs/FinalRobotCompetitionReport3_1.pdf](http://www.staffs.ac.uk/access-studies/docs/FinalRobotCompetitionReport3_1.pdf) (Accessed: 9 May 2012)

Smithers, R. (2004) 'Academic heads access body in conciliatory move', *The Guardian*, 16 October [Online]. Available at

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2004/oct/16/politics.highereducation> (Accessed: 6 June 2012)

Soan, S. (2010) *Improving Outcomes for Looked After Children: A practical guide to raising aspirations and achievement*. Cambridge: Optimus Education

Social Exclusion Unit (2003) *A better Education for Children in Care: the issues*.

Research in Practice [Online] Available at:

http://www.rip.org.uk/files/prompts/p1/P1SEU_full%20report.pdf (Accessed: 19 March 2012)

Social Work Inspection Agency (2006) *Extraordinary lives: creating a positive future for looked after children and young people in Scotland* [Online]. Available at:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/140731/0034643.pdf> (Accessed: 18 March 2013)

Sparrow (2012) 'University expansion has harmed social mobility, says IFS'. *The Guardian*, 29 June [Online]. Available at:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2012/jun/29/university-expansion-social-mobility-ifs> (Accessed: 9 April 2013)

Sroufe, L. (1979) 'The coherence of individual development. Early care, attachment and subsequent developmental issues', *American Psychologist*, 34 (10), pp. 834-841.

Available at: http://humsci.auburn.edu/classes/hdfs8040/Readings/sroufe_1979.pdf (Accessed on: 9 August 2012)

Stein, M. (2005) *Resilience and Young People Leaving Care. Overcoming the odds*, JRF [Online]. Available at: <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/185935369x.pdf> (Accessed: 5 September 2011)

Stein, M. (2004) *What works for young people leaving care?* Barkingside: Barnardo's

Stets, J. and Burke, P. (2012) *A sociological approach to self and identity* [Online].

Available at: <http://wat2146.ucr.edu/Papers/02a.pdf> (Accessed: 5 September 2011)

Steward, H. (2013) 'Strong services data signals UK may have sidestepped triple-dip recession', *The Guardian*, 4 April [Online] Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2013/apr/04/services-data-uk-triple-dip-recession-pmi> (Accessed: 4 April 2013)

Stott, T., and Hall, N. (2003) 'Changes in aspects of students' self-reported personal, social and technical skills during a six-week wilderness expedition in Arctic Greenland', *Journal Of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, 3 (2), pp. 159, EBSCOhost [Online] Available at: <http://0-ehis.ebscohost.com.brum.beds.ac.uk> (Accessed: 16 March 2013)

Strauss, A., and Corbin, J. (1990) *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage

Strauss, A., Corbin, J. (Eds) (1997) *Grounded theory in practice*. London: Sage

Stuart, M (2002) *Collaborating for change?* Leicester: NIACE

Sutton Trust (2011) *What prospects for mobility in the UK? A cross-national study of educational inequalities and their implications for future education and earnings mobility*. In partnership with the Russell Sage Foundation and the Pew Economic Mobility Project [Online] Available at: <http://www.suttontrust.com/research/summary-what-prospects-for-mobility-in-the-uk/> (Accessed: 16 April 2013)

Swain, J. (2007) 'Identity and exclusion: motivations, dispositions and identities on adult numeracy courses', *Journal of Access, policy and practice* Number, 4 (2), pp. 91-107

Sweeting, H., West, P., Young, R. and Kelly S. (2011) 'Dimensions of adolescent subjective social status within the school community: description and correlates', *Journal of Adolescence*, 34 (3), pp. 493-504. *PubMed* [Online]. Available at: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20579723> (Accessed: 19 March 2013)

Sztejman, C. (2010) 'Psychosocial Stress and Low Resilience: A Risk Factor for Hypertension', *Relations between Hypertension and Psychoanalysis*, 78 (5). Available at: http://www.scielo.org.ar/pdf/rac/v78n5/en_v78n5a04.pdf (Accessed on: 6 August 2012)

Taylor, C. (2012) *Improving alternative provision*. Department for Education [Online]. Available at: <http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/8/improving%20alternative%20provision.pdf> (Accessed: 25 March 2013)

Taylor, G., Mellor, L. and Walton, L. (2009) *The politics of widening participation: a review of the literature*. Active learning, Active Citizenship
University of Birmingham

The British Association of Social Workers and Social Workers Union (2012) *The state of social work: what social workers think about the state of their profession in 2012*. Research report [Online]. Available at: http://cdn.basw.co.uk/upload/basw_23651-3.pdf (Accessed: 11 March 2013)

The Catch22 National Care Advisory Service (2013) *Key Statistics* [Online]. Available at: http://leavingcare.org/?page_ID=72 (Accessed: 13 April 2013)

The Children's Legal Centre (2013) *Separated and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children* [Online]. Available at: http://www.childrenslegalcentre.com/index.php?page=separated_unaccompanied_asylum_seeking_children (Accessed: 3 March 2013)

The Children's Society (2008) *Give me a life: Reporting children seeking asylum in the UK. A practical guide for journalists* [Online]. Available at: <http://www.societyofeditors.co.uk/userfiles/file/SOERefugeeBook.pdf> (Accessed: 1 March 2012)

The Frank Buttle Trust (2012) *Quality Mark Institutions Commitment to Care Leavers* [Online]. Available at: <http://www.buttleuk.org/pages/quality-mark-institutions-commitment-to-care-leavers.html> (Accessed: 1 July 2012)

The Further Education Funding Council (2000). *Widening Participation and Raising Standards*. Report from the Directorate [Online]. Available at: http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/3461/1/widening_participation_and_raising_standards.pdf (Accessed: 1 June 2012)

The Guardian (2013a) 'Cutting youth services will brutalise young people's future', 2 August [Online]. Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/joepublic/2011/aug/02/cutting-youth-services-brutalise-future> (Accessed: 17 March 2013)

The Guardian (2013b) *Learning for longer* [Online] Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/participation-age> (Accessed: 13 May 2013)

The National Children's bureau (2011) *The Ripple Effect: The nature and impact of the children and young people's voluntary sector* [Online]. Available at: http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/431274/the_ripple_effect.pdf (Accessed: 17 March 2013)

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (2011) *Looked after children talk to Childline: Childline case notes* [Online]. Available at: http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/publications/casenotes/clcasenoteslookedafterchildr en_wdf80622.pdf (Accessed: 11 March 2013)

The Nationwide Association of Fostering Providers (2012) *Twice as many care leavers as other young adults expected to move out*. News release, 24 September [Online]. Available at: <http://www.nafp.co.uk/NAFP-News> (Accessed: 13 April 2013)

The Poverty Cite (2011) *United Kingdom: Looked after children* [Online]. Available at: <http://www.poverty.org.uk/29/index.shtml> (Accessed: 6 April 2013)

The Who Cares Trust (2012) *Education Matters in Care: A report by the independent cross-party inquiry into the educational attainment of looked after children in England* [Online]. Available at: http://www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk/data/files/Education_Matters_in_Care_September_2012.pdf (Accessed: 18 March 2013)

The Who Cares Trust (2013) *Life in care: the statistics* [Online]. Available at: <http://www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk/pages/the-statistics.html> (Accessed: 29 March 2013)

Thoits, P. (1995) 'Identity-relevant Events and Psychological Symptoms: A Cautionary Tale', *Journal of Health and Social Behaviour*, 36(1), pp. 72–82

Thomas, K. (2012) 'Outdoor learning is in a class of its own', *The Guardian*, 4 December, [Online]. Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/teacher-network/2012/dec/04/outdoor-learning-school-activities> (Accessed: 17 March 2013)

Thomas, L. (2011) 'Do pre-entry interventions such as 'Aimhigher' impact on student retention and success? A review of the literature', *Higher Education quarterly*, 65 (3), pp. 230-250

Times Higher (2013) 'Life after Aimhigher: access from the ground level', *Times Higher*, 21 March 2013 [Online]. Available at: <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/comment/opinion/life-after-aimhigher-access-from-the-ground-level/2002638.article> (Accessed: 28 March 2013)

Toomey, R., Ryan, C., Diaz, R., Russell, S. (2011) 'High School Gay–Straight Alliances (GSAs) and Young Adult Well-Being: An Examination of GSA Presence, Participation, and Perceived Effectiveness', *Journal of Applied Developmental Science*, 15 (4), 175–185

Trowler, P. (2011) *Researching your own institution: Higher Education*, British Educational Research Association online resource [Online]. Available at: http://www.bera.ac.uk/files/2011/06/researching_your_own_institution_higher_education.pdf. (Accessed: 15 November 2011)

Tupuola, A., Cattell, V. and Stansfeld, S. (2008) 'Vulnerable youth, dialogic exchanges and resilience: Some preliminary findings from an exploratory study in East London', *Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies*, 3 (3), pp. 174–181, *Taylor and Francis* [Online]. Available at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17450120802270392#tabModule> (Accessed: 3 April 2013)

Ulmer, J. and Spencer, W. (1999) 'The contributions of an interactionist approach to research and theory on criminal careers', *Theoretical Criminology*, 3 (5), *SocINDEX with Full Text* [Online]. Available at:

Ungar, M. (2003) 'Qualitative Contributions to Resilience Research', *Qualitative Social Work*, 2 (1), pp. 85-102, *Sage Journals* [Online]. Available at: <http://qsw.sagepub.com/content/2/1/85.short> (Accessed: 5 May 2012)

Ungar, M. (2004). *Nurturing hidden resilience in troubled youth*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press

Ungar, M. (2005) 'Resilience among children in child welfare, corrections, mental health and educational settings: Recommendations for service', *Child & Youth Care Forum*, 34 (6), pp. 445-464, *Springer Link* [Online]. Available at: <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10566-005-7756-6> (Accessed: 28 March 2013)

Ungar, M. (2006) *Strengths-based counselling with at-risk youth*. Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press.

- Ungar, M., Dumond, C and McDonald, W. (2005) 'Risk, Resilience and Outdoor Programmes for At-risk Children', *Journal of Social Work*, 5(3), pp. 319–338
- United Nations (2003) *World Youth Report. Chapter 11: Young People in a Globalizing World* [Online]. Available at:
<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/ch11.pdf> (Accessed: 1 November 2012)
- United Nations Children's Fund (2010) *Children & young people: participating in decision-making: a call for action*. Available at:
http://www.unicef.org/violencestudy/pdf/call_action.pdf (Accessed: 28 March 2013)
- Universities UK (2003) *Fair Enough?* Universities UK: London
- University of Bedfordshire (2010) *Ethical Guidance: 2009 - 2010*. Institute of Applied Social Research Ethics Committee [Online]. Available at:
http://www.beds.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/40807/Ethical_guidance_2009-2010.pdf (Accessed: 3 March 2010)
- University of Leicester (2011) *Working with local partners* [Online]. Available at:
<http://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/scs/team/our-impact/working-with-local-partners>
 (Accessed: 30 March 2013)
- Uprichard, E. (2008) 'Children as 'beings and becomings': children, childhood and temporality', *Children and Society*, 22 (4), pp. 303–313 [Online]. Available at:
[http://www.academia.edu/151132/Uprichard E. 2008 Children as Being and Becomings Children childhood and temporality Children and Society 22 4 303-313](http://www.academia.edu/151132/Uprichard_E._2008_Children_as_Being_and_Becomings_Children_childhood_and_temporality_Children_and_Society_22_4_303-313)
 (Accessed: 1 April 2012)
- Vasagar, J. (2011) 'Wrongly labelled' special needs children to get more pastoral care', *The Guardian*, 5 March [Online]. Available at:
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/mar/05/special-needs-pastoral-care-schools-shakeup> (Accessed: 16 April 2013)

Wachs, T. (2006) 'Contributions of Temperament to Buffering and Sensitization Processes in Children's Development', *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1094 (1), pp. 28-39, *Academic Search Elite*, EBSCOhost [Online]. Available at: <http://0-his.ebscohost.com.brum.beds.ac.uk> (Accessed: 21 March 2013)

Walker, J. and Donaldson, C. (2010) *Intervening to improve outcomes for vulnerable young people: a review of the evidence*. Research Report DFE-RR078. Department for Education [Online]. Available at: <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/DFE-RR078.pdf> (Accessed: 13 March 2013)

Waller, R., Hatt, S. and Harrison, N. (2010) *Not being able to see the 'ones' for the 'threes'! To what extent do socio-economic categories aid our understanding of students' family backgrounds and class experiences in the context of widening participation?* HEA [Online]. Available at: <http://www.srhe.ac.uk/conference2010/abstracts/0248.pdf> (Accessed: 7 March 2011)

Watson, A. (2012) 'It's time to take apprenticeships seriously', *The Guardian*, 9 May [Online]. Available at: <http://careers.guardian.co.uk/careers-blog/apprenticeships-career-paths> (Accessed: 20 March 2012)

Weare, K. and Gray, G. (2003) *What Works in Developing Children's Emotional and Social Competence and Wellbeing?* Department for Education [Online]. Available at: <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/RB456.pdf> (Accessed: 21 March 2013)

Webb, R. and Vulliamy, G. (2004) *A Multi-Agency Approach to Reducing Disaffection and Exclusions from School*. Research Report No 568. Department for Education and Skills [Online]. Available at:

<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/RR568.pdf>

(Accessed: 10 April 2013)

Werner, E. (1996) 'Vulnerable but invincible: High risk children from birth to adulthood', *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 5 (1), pp. 47-51, *Springer Link* [Online]. Available at:

<http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2FBF00538544?LI=true> (Accessed: 28 March 2013)

Werner, E. and Smith, R. (1988) *Vulnerable but invincible: a longitudinal study of resilient children and youth*. New York: Adams, Bannister and Cox

Werner, E. and Smith, R. (1990) *Overcoming the odds: high risk children from birth to adulthood*. New York: Cornell University Press

Wilkinson, S., Stöckl, A., Taggart, D. and Franks, W. (2009) *Surveying Hard to Reach Groups - Final Report*. School of Education and Lifelong Learning - Centre for Applied Research in Education and School of Medicine, Health Policy and Practice [Online].

Available at:

http://www.gywpct.nhs.uk/_store/documents/surveying_hard_to_reach_groups_final_report_sept_09.pdf (Accessed: 10 April 2013)

Williams, M. (2013) 'Why I chose an apprenticeship over university', *The Guardian*, 11 March [Online]. Available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2013/mar/11/why-i-chose-apprenticeship-over-university> (Accessed: 13 March 2013)

Wills, W., Appleton, J., Magnusson, J. and Brooks, F. (2008) 'Exploring the limitations of an adult-led agenda for understanding the health behaviours of young people', *Health and Social Care in the Community*, 16 (3), pp.244–252

Windle, G., Bennett, K., Noyes, J. (2011) 'A methodological review of resilience measurement scales', *Health and Quality of Life outcomes*, 9 (8), pp. 1-18 [Online]

Available at <http://www.hqlo.com/content/9/1/8> (Accessed: 14 July 2012)

Winkel, F., Blaauw, E., Sheridan, L., Baldry, A. (2003) 'Repeat Criminal Victimization and Vulnerability for Coping Failure: A Prospective Examination of a Potential Risk Factor', *Psychology, Crime and Law*, 9 (1), pp. 87-95

Winter, K. (2006) 'Widening our knowledge concerning young looked after children: the case for research using sociological models of childhood', *Child and Family Social Work*, 11 (1), pp. 55–64, *Wiley Online Library* [Online]. Available at: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1365-2206.2006.00385.x/pdf> (Accessed: 21 March 2013)

Wintour, P. and Stratton, A. (2008) 'Government plan to raise aspirations of millions of children', *The Guardian*, 15 December [Online]. Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2008/dec/15/children-reform-service-society-government> (Accessed: 28 March 2013)

Wolcott, H. (1994) *Transforming qualitative data: description, analysis, interpretation*. Thousand Oaks: Sage

Wolf, A. (2011) *Review of vocational education - the Wolf report* [Online]. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/180504/DFE-00031-2011.pdf (Accessed: 13 May 2013)

Wong, B. (2003) 'General and specific issues for researchers' consideration in applying the risk and resilience framework to the social domain of learning disabilities', *Learning disabilities Research and Practice*, 18 (2), pp. 68-76. *Wiley Online Library* [Online] Available at: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1540-5826.00060/pdf> (Accessed: 11 July 2012)

Wyness, M. (1999) 'Childhood, agency and education reform', *Childhood: A Journal of Global Child Research*, 6 (3), pp. 353-368

Yates, T., Egeland, B. and Sroufe, A. (2003) 'Rethinking resilience: a developmental process perspective', in Luthar, S. (Ed) *Resilience and vulnerability. Adaptation in the context of childhood adversities*. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 243-266

Yeung, W., Linver, M. and Brooks-Gunn, J. (2002) 'How money matters for young children's development: parental investment and family process', *Child Development*, 73 (6), pp. 1861-1879. *PubMed* [Online] Available at:

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12487499> (Accessed: 10 July 2012)

York Consulting (2007) *Aimhigher resource costs: a case study approach*. Final Report. Available at:

<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/RR841.pdf>

(Accessed: 17 March 2013)

Young Minds (2010) *See beyond our labels stigma survey* [Online]. Available at:

http://www.youngminds.org.uk/assets/0000/1323/stigma_survey_briefing_pdf.pdf

(Accessed: 28 June 2012)

Young Minds (2012) *Improving the mental health of Looked After Young People: an exploration of mental health stigma* [Online]. Available at

http://www.youngminds.org.uk/assets/0000/1440/6544_ART_FINAL_SPREADS.pdf

(Accessed: 28 June 2012)